SUMMARIES OF SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS

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submitted in compliance with the minimum requirements of BAS, adopted in accordance with Art. 2b, para. 5 of the Act on Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, for occupying the academic position “Professor”, which do not reproduce those presented for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Associate Professor”

I. MONOGRAPH

The monograph presents the theoretical assumptions for applying the approach of developmental cascades in explaination of the mechanisms of change in child development. It also aimed at operationalization of this approach, setting the methodological framework for its application. The empirical projections of this scientific approach necessitate directing the research focus towards the interconnectedness of processes in different domains and considering the thesis of variability and diversity of possible pathways for developmental change as a basic scientific principle.

In this context, the aim of the present work is to theoretically substantiate the relationships between motor development and exploratory activity in children, as well as to empirically investigate the concurrent relationships between them from birth to the first year. It defends the understanding that children's movements inherently possess an exploratory nature, similar to the object-oriented actions of children, and represent an important form of exploring and understanding the world and space, as well as mastering the capabilities of their own bodies. On the other hand, motor achievements radically influence the developmental context of other domains by modulating the information thus influencing the acquisition of knowledge, forming the basis for their learning.

The effects of the child's social connectivity are tracked in each of the age "windows" where the main research interest is focused.

At the beginning of the first chapter, an analysis is focused on the developmental cascades approach, its basic postulates, and the guiding principles for explanation of the changes in child development. The ideas proposed from the perspective of developmental cascades approach affirm that the changes occurring part of a developmental cascade extending beyond the domain and the age window of its initial investigation.

Taking into account the specificities of the regularities governing each content area, development is viewed as an open system where the changes can be triggered by the accomplishments already attained in other areas and by conditions in the current context.

In line with the main concepts and ideas of the book, the second paragraph of the first chapter represents an analysis of various approaches to explaining the characteristics of development and the emergence of new motor forms from birth to the first year, as well as arguments for the relationships between them and the child's exploration of the object world. Another important point in the first chapter is the child's exploratory activity, its forms, and dynamics from birth to the first year. The child's exploratory behavior from the earliest months reflects the effect of numerous factors that influence both the dynamics of its development and the forms that prevail in the child's activity at different ages.

The concluding element of the theoretical substantiation is the third paragraph, which reveals the peculiarities of the social basis of the child's exploratory behavior. It analyzes those aspects of the developing attachment system that provide a reliable basis for the balance between the child's need for protection and security and its need for discovery. At the same time, significant attention is given not only to the motivational aspect of parental influence but also to the cognitive dimensions of its supportive role in exploratory activity—such as aiding in the selectivity and sustainability of the child's attention, demonstrating specific actions, and encouraging the child to reproduce them.

In the second chapter, the theoretical prerequisites related to the developmental context in four age "windows" are presented, structured around the child's major motor achievements—raising the head, rolling over, reaching and grasping objects, sitting and crawling, and walking. These theoretical positions provide the basis for the goals and hypotheses of the conducted empirical studies. The main part of the second chapter is dedicated to the empirical results obtained, revealing the relationships between the new motor forms for each age window and the object-oriented exploratory activity. These are considered in the context of age-specific characteristics typical of child development in each of the selected intervals, with the corresponding effects of social interactions being established and revealed. Additionally, evidence is presented for the changes in the child's mental life, through which the mastered movements influence the conditions for conducting curiosity-driven exploration of the world.

The third chapter presents a summary of the theoretical positions of the developmental cascades approach and the empirical results of the relationships between children's motor skills and their exploratory activity in each of the four age windows, on the one hand, and the

processes of developing social connectivity, on the other. This chapter reflects the research approaches to atypical development and the potential of the developmental cascades approach for guiding and shaping contemporary intervention programs.

II. PAPERS, PUBLISHED IN SCIENTIFIC EDITIONS, REFERENCED AND INDEXED IN WORLD-RENOWNED DATABASES OF SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION

Trifonova, M.P. (2022). Quality of education and care in kindergartens and their readiness for inclusive education in Bulgaria, European Journal of Special Needs Education, DOI: 10.1080/2154896X.2022.2062905.

The article presents the results of an exploratory study on several aspects of the educational environment in kindergartens, which are particularly important for the successful implementation of inclusive education principles in practice. The study examines the relationships between the following structural aspects of the environment and its quality: number of children in the group, regional location of the kindergarten and teachers' professional experience.

The assessment of the educational quality was conducted in 40 randomly selected kindergartens from four regions of the country with the ECCERS-3 scale, which is widely used for such purposes in different countries. The results of multiple regression analysis reveal that greater professional experience of teachers is a predictor positively associated with better indicators of the quality of the educational environment. Conversely, a larger number of children in groups and the location of the kindergarten in highly populated cities including the capital, are negatively correlated with the criterion. Specific difficulties faced by pedagogical specialists in densely and sparsely populated areas are identified. These three predictors explain about 30% of the variation both in the overall quality score and in the individual subscales scores related to the instructional process and children's language acquisition.

The conclusions based on the analysis of the empirical data, could served as guidelines for improving teachers' in-service qualifications and the organisational environment in which they work, which are prerequisites for the successful implementation of inclusive education in accordance with current legislative reforms.

Trifonova, M. (2021). Evaluation of the quality of the environment for early childhood education and care – challenges and perspectives of contemporary practice. Pedagogy, Volume 93(7), 925-934.

This article offers a theoretical analysis of the main assumptions that define the quality of the educational environment, as well as a review of current empirical studies on its determinants and their effects. The quality assessment of the educational environment, despite differences across countries, is an important step in identifying weaknesses of the system and overcoming them. The analysis clarifies the structural and process dimensions of quality and the necessity to investigate the complex interrelationships between them, which determine their impact on children's outcomes. The article underscores the importance of defining the scope and different dimensions of quality in order to choose adequate assessment methods and ensure their content aligns with the set of criteria. The analysis also addresses methodological problems associated with applying scales for evaluating the educational environment.

Trifonova, M., Peneva, L. (2021). Exploring the quality of early childhood education and care environment in Bulgarian kindergartens. International Journal of Early Years Education, https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2021.1960801 .

The importance of the context and activities in which children are engaged in necessitates a careful study in order to better structure them in childcare practice. This in turn can have a significant effect in stimulating children, provoking their interest and curiosity, and fostering their independent activity in understanding the world. This article focuses on evaluating various aspects of the educational environment using the ECCERS-3 scale. It presents new empirical research that highlights both strengths and weaknesses, offering insights into areas where educational policies in Bulgaria need to be addressed. The analysis reveals that the scores on the ECERS-3 subscales differ significantly. The subscale related to educational activities has the lowest score due to the insufficient application of individualised approaches by teachers, and the lack of activities tailored to the children's individual characteristics and needs. The educational process is dominated by teacher-initiated activities (i.e. pedagogical situations) restricting the time that children can freely choose their games and activities. In practice, the opportunities for learning through collaborative activities organised in small groups are not used effectively, which is an important element of socialisation and the successful development of social skills. The study found weaknesses in language-related activities, including an insufficient use of literature in kindergarten activities

and a lack of conversational opportunities. Another important aspect where the analysis of the results reveals weaknesses is related to the insufficient efforts to foster tolerance in children towards diversity and to overcome certain stereotypes towards people from vulnerable groups and those with special needs. A positive evaluation is given to the approach of communication and interaction between teachers and children, characterised by frequent emotional support, informal conversations, and encouragement.

Trifonova, M., Aleksandrova-Karamanova, A., Peneva, L. (2018). The Professional Experience and Readiness of Teachers for the Successful Implementation of Inclusive Education in Kindergartens. Pedagogy, Volume 90, Issue 8, 1122-1133.

This article presents the findings of an empirical study exploring the relationships between various factors and teachers' self-assessment regarding their success in working with children with special needs and their confidence in implementing the goals of inclusive education. The multiple regression analysis identifies significant effects of all predictors on the criterion. There is a positive correlation between the confidence and success of teachers, and the following factors: number of children in the kindergarten, participation in courses related to inclusive education, and professional experience with children with special needs. Conversely the regional density shows significant but negative effect. The analysis focuses on structural aspects of the educational environment, professional qualifications, and specialized experience of kindergarten teachers in Bulgaria. Based on the empirical findings the article provides recommendations for improving the organizational context in various regions.

III. ARTICLES AND REPORTS, PUBLISHED IN NON-REFERENCED JOURNALS OR COLLECTIONS WITH SCIENTIFIC REVIEW (UP TO 20 STANDARD PAGES)

Trifonova, M. The Reproduction of Observed Actions by Children: A Mediator of the Relationship Between Motor Achievements and Language Acquisition. Bulgarian Journal of Psychology, 2024, in press.

The transition from crawling to walking marks the beginning of changes in key areas of child development, as the child has increased opportunities for exploration, active social learning, a better understanding of actions, and the capacity for accelerated language acquisition. This study reveals the importance of imitation in 10-12-month-old infants as a mediator in the relationship between their motor and language skills. The participants—117

infants with an average age of 47.8 weeks—were observed by experts in their homes. Their behaviour was assessed through various motor and linguistic tasks, and tasks requiring the reproduction of actions demonstrated by the mother. The results showed that reproducing shown actions significantly, though partially mediates the indirect effect of gross motor skills on both receptive and expressive language. Reproducing actions suggests active social learning by the children, participation in episodes of shared attention with the parent, good understanding of intentions, and mutual coordination. The child's involvement in joint actions with the parent stimulates the understanding of the means-goal relationship, reflecting higher-order goals and encouraging language acquisition.

Stoyanova-Shiryaev, R., Atanasova-Trifonova, M. Study of the Differentiation of the Living-Nonliving Category in Three- and Four-Year-Old Children. Bulgarian Journal of Psychology, 2024, in press.

Categorization in early childhood is a complex process, explained by various theoretical models and hypotheses about the underlying cognitive mechanisms. To understand cognitive development and the conceptual enrichment and change of biological knowledge, it is crucial to identify age-related differences in how three- and four-year-old children comprehend the elements of the categories "living" and "non-living." This article presents a data analysis from a pilot study on the categorization process involving various exemplars related to biological knowledge. The results of free sorting tasks, as well as tasks requiring the formation of two groups—living and non-living objects—show that children understand the basic characteristics of these categories and the principles for distinguishing between them. However, there remains some confusion regarding plants. These findings align with previous research, further supported by hierarchical cluster analysis, which reveals that children tend to activate paradigmatic connections with plants and still face challenges in forming taxonomic relationships that include plants in the same category as animals and humans.

Petkov, G., Atanasova-Trifonova, M., Stoyanova-Shiryaev, R. (2022). Approaches to Studying the Cognitive Mechanisms of Categorization in Early Childhood. "Psychology – Tradition and Modernity," Proceedings of the Jubilee International Scientific Conference on the 50th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Psychology Specialty. Sofia: University Publishing House "St. Kliment Ohridski," 845-855. ISBN 978-954-07-5611-0 (Online)

This paper presents a comparative analysis and critical examination of various theoretical perspectives on the mechanisms of categorization development in early childhood. The cognitive processes facilitating concept learning during early childhood have been widely studied across different theoretical approaches. Understanding these perspectives and their commonalities is a necessary step in building upon existing scientific knowledge, proving, or refuting it. The main topics discussed are related to the role of nature and experience, the balance between bottom-up and top-down processes in categorization, the existence of different functional systems, and the role of language in the development of the conceptual system.

Stoyanova-Shiryaev, R., Atanasova-Trifonova, M., Petkov, G. (2022). Research Directions in Studying and Supporting Categorization Processes Related to Biological Knowledge in Early Childhood. Proceedings of the National School for Doctoral Students and Young Researchers in Social Sciences. Pathways to Sustainable Development: Approaches and Contributions of Social Sciences. ISSN 2683-0868 (Online) Volume 3, May 2022, 83-91.

The development of children's knowledge about the world during early childhood is characterised by intensity and multidimensionality. Children accumulate diverse information about the world’s various aspects—regularities of physics, the social and biological world. Categorization processes enable children to structure this information into a taxonomic system, to discover causal relationships, to make inductive inferences, and transfer knowledge from one domain to another. This article reviews the main approaches and research on children's knowledge of biology, how it evolves during early childhood, and the sequence in mastering the vitalist principle. Based on the analysis of numerous experimental data, the article provides framework for experimental conditions that foster cognitive plasticity in organising and reorganising categorical information about exemplars of the biological world, as well as their properties.

Atanasova-Trifonova, M. (2021). Investigating the Psychometric Properties – External Validity, Sensitivity, Specificity, and Reliability of the Screening Test for Three-Year-Olds – Short Form. Bulgarian Journal of Psychology, 2(4), 124-134. ISSN 0861-7813.

The main goal of this study is to establish the psychometric parameters—external validity, sensitivity, specificity, and reliability—of the screening test for three-year-olds. The

validation of the screening test is based on direct empirical data from children (N = 122) assessed using the screening test and the Cognitive Subscale of the Bayley III Scales of Infant and Toddler Development, as well as the Denver II test. Data analysis reveals a statistically significant positive correlation (r = 0.63, p = 0.00) between the total score of the screening test and the score on the Cognitive Subscale of the Bayley III Scales, as well as between the scores on this scale and the "Cognitive Development" subscale of the screening test (r = 0.54, p = 0.00). AUC values above 0.86 indicate the accuracy of the screening assessment. Sensitivity in the two age groups ranges from 0.40 to 0.62 at the critical 10th percentile threshold and from 0.6 to 0.75 at the 20th percentile. Specificity is high, ranging from 0.84 to 0.92. The results for the internal consistency of the entire test are very good, and for the subscales, the values are partly satisfactory and acceptable, ranging from 0.63 to 0.74.

The psychometric parameters studied in this analysis allow the screening test to be successfully applied for its intended purposes, providing reliable information about overall child development.

Bogdanova, E., Atanasova-Trifonova, M., Lalova, Y. (2021). Emotional Stroop Test with Faces in Primary School-Aged Children. Psychological Research, Volume 24 (2), 143-159. ISSN: 1311-4700.

This article presents the results of a study that tested a created pictorial emotion Stroop test with typically developing pupils from three age groups within the 7-12 years range (N=161). The results align with findings from other studies, showing that reaction times for stimuli with emotional content are significantly shorter compared to neutral stimuli. Additionally, reaction times are notably shorter for stimuli with positive emotional expressions compared to those with negative emotional expressions. Age-related differences in reaction speed to stimuli are confirmed, with reaction times decreasing as age increases, linked to the development of executive functions, attention resources, and motor response control.

Bogdanova, E., Trifonova, M., Lalova, Y. (2020). Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) – 4-16 Years (Parent Form) – Preliminary Results from a Bulgarian Sample of Students. Psychological Research, Volume 23 (3), 314-329. ISSN: 1311-4700.

This study presents the results from investigation of students in grades I-V (N=153), which included the use of the "Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire" (SDQ)-parents form

alongside methods examining their executive functions. The results of the questionnaire were compared to those from other international studies. An exploratory analysis confirmed the five-factor structure of the questionnaire, similar to the original English version. The internal consistency coefficients for the individual scales and the overall scale were satisfactory (Cronbach's $\alpha = .705$). The mean values of the questionnaire were close to those of the English sample, with a slight tendency towards higher mean values for both the overall score and most scales. These data points provide a foundation for the further validation of the parent form of the questionnaire, which is a necessary step for its practical application in Bulgaria.

Atanasova-Trifonova, M., Bogdanova, E. (2019). New Educational Technologies "Learning Progression" and Their Application in Preschool Education. Psychological Research, Volume 22, Issue 1, 103-116. ISSN: 1311-4700.

Understanding students' learning progression in mastering subject content in various fields and aligning educational goals with empirically established regularities in this process is a promising trend in new educational technologies. This trend is increasingly applied across different educational levels, including the earliest preschool stage. Studying children's understanding of the world, their explanations of various phenomena, and identifying patterns of change in their perceptions, helps better align educational goals with the age-specific characteristics and the dynamics of their cognitive abilities.

This article presents the results of an exploratory study aiming to determine the extent to which children in different kindergarten groups meet teacher-expected outcomes in the areas of "Mathematics" (Spatial Relations) and "Bulgarian Language" (Grammatically correct speech).

According to the assessment of teachers, the majority of children (75-100%) in both age groups demonstrate the achievements expected for their age, raising questions about the age validity of the educational objectives for preschool groups. Additionally, the content of the Bulgarian language standards lacks differentiation of various levels of mastery for specific achievements, such as the use of different verb tenses by the children.

It is defined only in the expected outcomes for the third group and remains an isolated achievement, without specifying either the preceding or subsequent higher levels in the development of this competence. This disrupts the vertical continuity and complicates the systematic setting of educational goals in this area.

Bogdanova, E., Trifonova, M., Lalova, Y., Popova, K. (2018). Kindergarten Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Draft Ordinance on Preschool Education. Psychological Research, Volume 21, Issue 1, 95-109. ISSN: 1311-4700.

Teachers play the main role in organizing pedagogical interactions between children and their parents. The teacher’s activity, initiatives, and dedication determine the quality of the environment for children's upbringing and socialization. The study examines the attitudes of kindergarten teachers and their readiness for the changes in the organization of the educational process and curricula as proposed in the Draft Ordinance on Preschool Education. The analysis includes the responses of teachers-participants in a national representative study (N=1405) regarding changes in educational objectives, proposals, and the availability of resources for creating new program systems. The results suggest that a broad and effective information campaign is necessary before initiating changes in the educational system, as 44.4% of participants could not evaluate the changes or their impact on quality, and only one-third believed the changes would improve quality of education. Furthermore, a significant part (over three-quarters) of respondents think that their kindergartens lacked the resources necessary to create new program systems as allowed by the Ordinance. Teachers, being the most crucial pillar in educational reform, should be active participants in this process to ensure effective changes in educational practice.

Atanasova-Trifonova, M. P. (2017). Early Assessment of Support Needs for Personal Development. In the compilation "Inclusive Education in Kindergarten", RAABE, ISBN 978-619-7315-10-3, 55-81.

In the article are presented and argued several topics from a psychological perspective, with an emphasis on the early assessment of the need for support in the personal development of children within kindergartens. The necessity for early assessment of the development and risk of difficulties in three-year-old children is substantiated by the characteristics of this age period, where brain plasticity creates the possibility for change, and synaptogenesis and the dynamics of myelination favour the results and effects of early intervention. During this critical period, systems can be built to compensate for certain disruptions in children's mental functioning, thus contributing to their mental well-being and adaptation to their natural social environment. Special attention is given to the conditions and organization of the screening assessment process, as well as the prerequisites for its quality and professional execution by educational specialists. An overview of existing screening tools suitable for examining

children during early childhood is presented, with a focus on their psychometric properties and the interpretation of the results obtained.

Trifonova, M.A., Lalova, Y., Bogdanova, E., Popova, K. (2016). Kindergarten Teachers' Approach to Children's Play in Preschool Age. Psychological Research, Volume 19, Issue 2, Publishing House of BAS "Marin Drinov", ISSN: 1311-4700, 145-158.

Despite the classic theories on the role of play in a child's development, contemporary psychological research continues to explore and discuss various aspects related to the balance between educational and playful elements; the role of pretend play in symbolic function formation; and the balance between free, spontaneous play initiated by children and teacher-initiated play aimed at specific didactic goals. Comparative international studies reveal significant sociocultural differences in the educational context of play, prompting an investigation into its role in Bulgarian preschool education. This article presents the results of a nationally representative study involving 1405 teachers from 300 kindergartens. It explores, on one hand, children's play preferences and age-related differences in their choices from the educators' perspective, and on the other, the attitudes and approaches of pedagogical specialists towards various types of play and the goals they serve. Statistically significant differences were found in the ranking of educational outcomes achieved through play between teachers with different professional experiences. Teachers with over 20 years of experience emphasized the development and enrichment of children's knowledge of the world through play, whereas teachers with up to 5 years of experience focused on children's social skills, initiative, positive emotional involvement, and cognitive functions developed through play.

Atanasova-Trifonova, M.P. (2016). Standards of Development and Learning: A Guide for the Overall Physical and Mental Well-being of the Child. Practical Pediatrics, 3, ISSN: 2367-5268.

This article outlines the importance of development standards as a reference for ensuring the holistic physical and mental well-being of children. It emphasizes that these standards serve as guidelines for parents, educators, and healthcare professionals in monitoring and supporting the comprehensive growth and development of children. The discussion includes practical recommendations for fostering a healthy developmental environment for young children.

Atanasova-Trifonova, M.P., Stoyanova, Yul. (2016). Socio-Emotional Skills and Language Development in Children at Two Age Intervals: 7-9 Months and 19-24 Months. Psychological Research, Volume 18, Issue 2, ISSN: 0205-0617, 163-170.

This study investigates the socio-emotional skills and language development in children at two critical age intervals: 7-9 months and 19-24 months.

Findings for 7-9 Months: During this period, children frequently produce sounds and sound sequences that include various syllabic combinations, known as babbling. This babbling often occurs spontaneously but can also be provoked by interaction with a caregiver. The dyadic interactions between the child and caregiver become increasingly complex, involving supportive behaviors. The empirical study aims to identify the potential of dyadic interactions to provoke imitative behavior in children aged 7-9 months (N = 120) in the context of speech stimuli reproduction. The findings revealed the significant positive correlations between the success of this imitative behavior and the level of play interactions between the child and the mother.

Findings for 19-24 Months**:** In the second year of life, the dynamics of self-awareness processes in children lead to their ability to differentiate their physical image and recognize themselves in a mirror. This self-awareness helps them become more active participants, asserting their independence in various activities and engaging more appropriately in joint tasks. The study explored the connection between self-awareness and language development in children aged 19-24 months (N = 120), using productive speech, particularly the ability to construct and use interrogative sentences, as an indicator of language development. Statistically significant differences between groups with varying degrees of language and socio-emotional development confirmed the hypothesis of interrelated processes between language acquisition and the development of social experiences, especially the social connectedness in the mother-child dyad. These findings underscore the importance of early dyadic interactions in both socio-emotional and language development, highlighting the intricate link between a child's social environment and their linguistic abilities.

Atanasova-Trifonova, M.P. (2016). Standards for Early Childhood Development and Learning within a Holistic Approach to Development. Med Post, Issue 7, ISSN: 2367-6469, 16-22.

This article discusses the role of standards of early childhood development and learning, focusing on a holistic approach. The standards reflect the main achievements in a child's physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and language development, manifestations of

various competencies, knowledge, and actions. They have been validated through research involving 963 children, evenly distributed across eight age groups and balanced by gender. This project was supported by UNICEF Bulgaria.

The article presents empirical data both from the validation study of the standards for early childhood development and learning, as well as from a nationally representative study of parental practices in raising and stimulating children aged 0-5 months and 6-12 months, conducted with 2,141 participants (parents/caregivers). It has been found that nearly one-third of parents underestimate the importance of motor skills and the practice of gymnastics and massage to strengthen the child's gross muscles. Additionally, they do not provide the necessary free space at home to facilitate the child's learning to walk.

From the perspective of emerging attachment in the mother-child dyad, the frequency of verbal communication is analyzed, with only 49.5% of participating parents actively engaging in it. This result is interpreted as a significant portion of parents underestimating the importance of direct speech for the overall development of their children.

Providing opportunities for children to hear natural speech, especially from key caregivers, is crucial for recognizing language patterns, differentiating speech sounds, and forming connections between words and objects. The article argues for the need for policies aimed at enhancing parental involvement in stimulating child development.

Effective interaction strategies and parental education can improve the support given to children, leading to better developmental outcomes.

This article underscores the importance of setting and adhering to developmental standards while advocating for enhanced support and training for parents to foster optimal child development through holistic approaches.

VI. PUBLISHED CHAPTERS IN COLLECTIVE MONOGRAPHS

Atanasova-Trifonova, M., Peneva, L., Stoyanova (2023). The early screening assessment and guidelines for stimulating the development of three-year-old children, S., RCCIE, Ministry of Education, p. 196

The monograph addresses the challenges of early risk assessment in children, focusing on potential future difficulties in areas such as adaptation, communication, emotional regulation, cognitive functioning, language acquisition, and understanding of the world. Early screening assessments help specialists determine the need for follow-up actions to monitor a

child's development, to observe certain emotional and behavioural manifestations with a focus on the qualities and specifics of their individual characteristics.

In the first chapter, the theoretical foundations of inclusive education are presented, along with the regulatory framework set by the adopted normative documents that outline its implementation in educational practice. Early detection of developmental problems, followed by effective early intervention, reduces the likelihood of deepening issues in the respective area and helps prevent secondary disabilities in other areas.

Chapter 2: Content and Theoretical Justification of the Screening Test for Three-Year-Old Children (Paragraphs 2.1; 2.3; 2.4)

As a result of the conducted factor analysis, the structure of the screening test was established, which is best described by a bifactor model. The basic factor in this model includes all items related to children's cognitive abilities and receptive language skills. The second-order factors are associated with motor skills, productive speech, understanding of spatial relationships (use of prepositions), emotional cognition and differentiation of emotional expressions, as well as basic social skills demonstrated by three-year-old children.

Based on an analysis of the age at which various cognitive skills are acquired, items were selected that pertain to causal understanding, analogy reasoning, quantity evaluation, and counting. The selection of these items is theoretically justified by the characteristics of the primary processes they involve, supported by numerous contemporary empirical studies that reveal the regularities in the age-related dynamics. A child's ability to identify the relations between pairs of objects, and to represent operations with quantities are amongst the key cognitive achievements. These serve as precursors to the mastery of specific skills across various content areas, including emotion cognition and the understanding of social processes, which aid the child's orientation in communication with others. A child's constructive interactions with others, empathy, the norms acquisition and prosocial behaviour are essential aspects of successful socialization, which are revealed through a set of various test situations.

Chapter 3: Preparation and Conducting the Screening Study**

The professional administration of the screening test requires not only the skills and competencies of specialists but also proper training, thorough preparation, and organization of the process, as well as the environment in which it will be conducted. This chapter provides a detailed description of the conditions necessary for conducting the study with children within the preschool setting, including the space that needs to be secured for this activity, the materials required for its implementation, etc.

Administering each test to three-year-old children is challenging and demands a well-considered approach to motivation, friendly communication, and support, all tailored to the child's individual and temperamental characteristics. This chapter also places an emphasis on the results obtained from the screening test, as well as from the parents' and the teachers" questionnaires.

A comprehensive evaluation, combining various methods, allows for a more objective assessment of the child's individual characteristics, strengths, and developmental challenges.

Chapter 4: Active Interaction with Parents - A Key Factor for Successful Inclusion

Establishing a trusting relationship between educational specialists and parents is of paramount importance for the consistency and constructiveness of their collaboration. This relationship is a crucial factor in creating a supportive context necessary to stimulate children's development and overcome the difficulties they face. Therefore, this chapter of the monograph focuses on the processes occurring within the family when developmental difficulties are identified, the gradual adaptation of parents to the child's current state, which often requires them to restructure their priorities and mobilize resources to address these challenges, both in the short- and long-term perspective.

Parents should be assisted in forming realistic expectations regarding the activities planned to stimulate the child, the specifics of the entire process, their role in it, the challenges they will encounter, the expected outcomes, and, most importantly, the ultimate goal: achieving the child's psychological well-being within the group of their peers.

Chapter 5: Guidelines for Creating a Stimulating Environment for Children's Development (Paragraphs 5.1; 5.3.)

Summarizing the experience and empirical results from applying various models in cognitive psychology to stimulate cognitive activity and learning in early childhood allows for outlining basic guidelines in organizing the educational environment. These guidelines are presented in the fifth chapter of the monograph, based on the understanding that children are active participants, and their curiosity, independent exploration, and experimentation should be encouraged primarily through play.

The application of play within a child-centred approach can contribute to the development of exploratory behaviour, the expansion of knowledge, and active social interaction with peers.

Working with children who have cognitive functioning challenges should be grounded in multimodality, incorporating different senses and motor patterns in the construction of new cognitive schemas. This approach ensures that children engage with the material in a way that

aligns with their individual learning needs, helping them build more robust and flexible understanding across various domains.

In the tradition established by Bowlby and his followers, it is recognized that both responding to a child's emotional signals and thoughtfully structuring their environment to nurture their individual abilities are crucial aspects of parental care. Within this framework, a set of strategies is proposed to assist parents and educational specialists in refining their interactions and employing successful everyday approaches aimed at improving children's communication skills and their ability to adapt and function successfully in a social environment.

These strategies aim to stimulate active interaction with the child, shared attention, turn-taking in communication, setting goals for joint activities, building synchrony between participants, and more. Communication skills, tolerant behavior, and the ability to form and maintain social relationships with peers are fundamental to the child's successful adaptation and socialization, ultimately contributing to their overall psychological well-being.

For the successful development and progress in a child's emotional regulation, it is important to respect their choices and encourage their attempts at independent actions. It is crucial to help the child set achievable goals without restricting their initiative.