*Вх. № ЧР-03-367/07.10.2024 г.*

# STANDPOINT

by prof. Georgi Aleksandrov Madzharov (St. Cyril and Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo), doctor of psychology in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology on the submitted materials for participation in a competition for the academic position of 'professor' in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional direction 3.2. Psychology (Psychology of early childhood) for the Department "Psychology of development and health", announced in the "State Gazette", issue 58 of July 2, 2024, with candidate Maria Petrova Trifonova, PhD in psychology, associate professor at the Institute for Population and Human Research of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences

## I. Research activity and results

### 1. Monographic work impressions

Life is an interaction with reality in two opposite directions: (1) reality impacts a person and changes him and (2) a person impacts reality and changes it. These two directions are sometimes called 'outside in' and 'inside out'; also 'interiorization' and 'exteriorization'; also 'assimilation' and 'accommodation', other synonyms are used too. The imprints of reality 'from the outside in' create its image (reflection) in mind, which the individual uses later for his impact on reality ('from the inside out'). We should be not far wrong if assume that mind is a mechanism for correct depicting reality in order to successfully influence it with own actions. Therefore, the main processes in child development are two: (1) cognize reality and (2) cognize own impact on it (i.e. learning to behave). These two processes do not occur simultaneously, but rather sequentially and repeatedly, because in order to affect a fragment of reality, it should first be brought into the mind (i.e. cognized; interiorized). We would not be able to withdraw money from an ATM if we did not understand in advance its properties, consideration of which causes the ATM to offer us money; we cannot drive a car if we did not understand in advance, usually in a classroom, its properties, consideration of which has as result the car motion. As well as being sequential, these two processes are also quite lengthy: getting to know the car, for example (i.e. the driving course) takes months, only after which we become able to use a car. What is more, getting to know both the car and driving goes on for years, hesitantly and repeatedly, after the driving course.

This is probably why there are intervals in children's development (sometimes called 'sensitive periods', 'phases', also 'age windows') in which children preferentially bring into their mind (get to

know) rules from reality, followed by intervals in which with priority they seek to know their impact on reality (i.e. to learn behavior that change reality). Development can thus be seen as repeatedly becoming more and more properly imprint of reality (interiorization), repeatedly followed by the acquisition of increasingly complex, increasingly prolonged, and increasingly relevant behaviors (exteriorization). Yes, I still remember this is a statement on submitted materials☺, as far as the most essential research activity of Mrs. Trifonova is aimed at clarifying exactly this mechanism in child development with two elements: (1) cognizing reality, and (2) cognizing behavior. She accepted the idea that the single elements of development are 'developmental cascades', each of which contains both object recognition and behavioral acquisition within its own 'age window' ('new motor skills and their interrelationships with exploratory activity", p. 147 of the monograph "Movement and exploration of the world by child"). I took the liberty of assuming that this was the essence of 'developmental cascades' and 'age windows', since I did not find an unambiguous definition of them in the monograph; delving into the references seemed to me to be beyond the scope of a statement (that's why I would be happy to have Ms. Trifonova's explanation if my guess is correct). The monograph presents original research on four 'development windows', i.e. rules of development, which is a serious scientific contribution given the scarcely and fragmentarily understood by psychology the essence of the child first year development.

**2. Assessment of contributions in the other attached publications**

Ms. Trifonova's other attached publications present her research on the correspondence and unity between knowledge acquisition and behavior acquisition not only in the first year but throughout childhood until adolescence. Knowledge of such intervals, fixed by the evolution and society (acquisition of knowledge and acquisition of behavior), is important for educators, parents, and educational administrators, for the proper design of curricula for children of different ages. In revealing many of these rules is the essence of scientific and applied contributions, and the originality of Ms. Trifonova's research. Her contributions are published, and listed in detail in the reference for scientific contributions.

A second major area of Ms. Trifonova's creative and research activity is issues of inclusive education, accompanied by publications of her research in this area in refereed and reviewed journals. The scientific and applied importance of the knowledge and technologies of inclusive education is obvious enough, so I will not reproduce it.

**3. Quoting from other authors**

The attached documentation lists 29 citations, 7 of them in refereed and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information.

**4. Evaluation of the results of participation in research and creative projects and application of the results in practice**

The results of participation in research and creative projects and their application are evidenced by the honours and awards of Ms Trifonova: diploma for scientific and applied activity; award for significant contribution in the field of psychology of early childhood (Institute for Population and Human Research, BAS).

**5. Scientific contribution, originality of the presented works and reliability of the presented scientific data**

I accept the obtained research results as credible, original, and representing a scientific contribution.

**II. Teaching and lecturing**: post-doctoral specialization at "New Bulgarian University"; lecturer in psychology at 'New Bulgarian University'; lecturer in psychology at the Southwest University "Neofit Rilski" (Blagoevgrad); supervision of two doctoral students.

**III. Administrative and public activities**

The list of Ms Trifonova's administrative and public activities is impressive: Head of the Psychology Department of the Institute for Population and Human Research since 2022; Head of the Developmental and Health Psychology Department at the Institute for Population and Human Research for ten years; Program leader for Evaluation of Educational Programs at the non-governmental public organization Open Education Centre; Human Resources and Recruitment Consultant (regional) at the Ernst & Young transnational corporation; leadership of numerous national and international projects.

**IV. Fulfilling the requirements for the academic position**

The requirements for the academic post of 'Professor' have been fulfilled by the candidate. The following scientific metrics with the required number of points are available: dissertation for the award of the degree of 'Doctor', habilitation thesis (monograph), published chapters of collective monographs (6 pcs.), articles and reports published in edited and reviewed scientific journals (18 pcs., 4 of them in refereed and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information), citations, participation in 6 national scientific and educational projects (in 5 of them as a supervisor, including two international), long-time experienced teacher.

**V. Personal impressions of the candidate**

There are some. In the 40 years that I have known Mrs. Trifonova, she has quickly and long since grown up as a successful experienced researcher, organizer and administrator of research, educator, responsive selfless colleague, mentor of young people.

**VI. Opinion on the activity and achievements of the candidate**

There is also one: Ms. Trifonova has long (for years) possessed the academic potential and achievements to occupy the academic position under this competition.

**CONCLUSION**

Ms Trifonova is an established scholar with her own personality, field of research and solid scholarly output. Her publications reflect her in-depth research activity with significant contributions and scientifically applied results. Her research and teaching activities fully satisfy the criteria for the academic position of ‘Professor’. I positively evaluate the candidate's academic activity (scientific, educational, and administrative) and propose the Academic Council to elect Ms Maria Petrova Trifonova to the academic position of 'Professor'.

Sofia, Prof. George Madjarov, PhD

October 7, 2024 _____