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## Therapy model of supporting social performance of children with developmental deficiencies

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## Therapy model of supporting social performance of children with developmental deficiencies

Model terapii wspomagającej funkcjonowanie dziecka z deficytami rozwojowymi w środowisku wychowawczym

### Introduction

Multidisciplinary support for children aged 3 with diagnosed developmental deficiencies is an important issue both for teachers, educators and all who are involved in the process of upbringing young generation. This also refers to parents as being a guardian is not just taking care, a responsible parenthood is also ensuring a child the best opportunities to develop their inborn potential. Each child develops at a different pace and therefore every child needs an individual approach. In the article the author presents the model of holistic work with children from the third year of age consisting of therapeutic work combined with family cooperation. The author will also present the results obtained by 153 children enrolled into the project, conducted by Miejski Zespół Poradni Psychologiczno-Pedagogicznych in Kielce in pedagogy field.

### Therapy model – theoretical implications

Therapy model of work with children who show developmental deficits from the third year of age is based on a holistic approach to child's development and their family environment.

Holistic approach concerning a child is a contemporary pedagogical guidance of a multidisciplinary dimension and involves comprehensive approach to child's development. It takes into account the totality of interactions, both external and internal ones that influence child's behavior. The range of conditions associated with the development of a young

person are both genetic, environmental, institutional, and include self-activity of the child with a specificity of their personality. These factors determine the way in which the child is functioning in a social environment. At the same time the emergence of difficulties in adapting to the requirements of the child's educational environment created by adaptive processes can hinder a child to operate efficiently in the social environment. However, early intervention and supporting the child in their development from the earliest stage can decisively increase its development and reduce areas that cause difficulties.

How the child operates in the social area is dependent on a combination<sup>1</sup> of factors such as: thinking, speech, motor skills, cognitive functions, social-emotional functioning and the environment in which the child lives (Fig. 1). These factors mutually condition, interact and complement each other. In different periods of life, their impact is different but they affect – indirectly or directly each other, which is reflected in the functioning of the child.

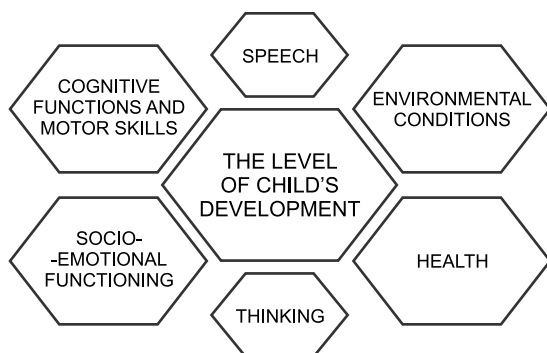


Figure 1. Factors influencing child's development

To help a child in effective participation in the social environment, a teacher or a therapist should consider all of these elements as their importance in the process of upbringing a child is huge.

A child's early home environment has a profound effect on their well-being. A supportive parents, who engage time in the process of upbringing a child can help their kid to achieve their full developmental potential while a problematic

<sup>1</sup> J. Pórola-Góral, *Model strukturalny rozwoju dziecka. Diagnoza funkcjonalna. Zarys koncepcji*, Biuletyn pedagogiczny nr 3 i 4, „Innowacyjny model pracy z dzieckiem od 3-go roku życia – analiza efektów prowadzonych działań terapeutycznych”, Kielce 2013, s. 3.

home environment can disrupt this process and interfere their development. Child's health including physical, mental and social well-being also determine the way the child is going to function in the social background. The ability to communicate with others and the level of speech performance is the next aspect that contributes to the manner how the child will feel among others.

One should remember that developmental disorders do not appear suddenly, the children have already had them and they have simply not been detected or were neglected, as no therapeutic work has been taken in time. The disorders include all areas of child development: communicational, emotional, social and motoric functioning.

The main focus area in the research<sup>2</sup> was to examine if the development of key competences in the period from the third to sixth year old at children who have had developmental deficiencies diagnosed at the age of 3 in the field of psychological, sensory integration, speech and pedagogical teaching improve their functioning in the environment.

On that basis the main hypothesis was formulated, according to which it can be presumed that early therapeutic intervention with a multi specialist support will improve the functioning of the child at the stage of completion the primary education level.

### Screening tests

All children who took part in the therapeutic sessions revealed developmental deficits which were defined by specialists during screening tests. The aim of the screening tests conducting in 2011 was to assess the socio-emotional development of three years old children attending kindergartens in Kielce (with use of psycho-pedagogical screening tests), and the assessment of the level speech development (with use of speech and language screening tests). Screening tests were conducted among 1253 children aged from 3.0 to 3.11 years. In this group there were 638 (51%) girls and 615 boys (49%). Out of those diagnosed children 153 who gained the lowest results were qualified to participate in the

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<sup>2</sup> Research conducted in 2012–2014 in Miejski Zespół Poradni Psychologiczno-Pedagogicznych in Kielce for N = 153 within the project called Career Academy for 3 years old children who have had delays and developmental disorders diagnosed in screening tests. The project was entirely funded by the European Union.

therapeutic sessions in the field of psychological, sensory integration, speech and pedagogical trainings.

To help any child overcome their problems, caused by developmental deficiencies and disorders, a reliable diagnosis is indispensable, which can describe the reasons of the problem but from the developmental perspective as only such a profound diagnosis can be a therapeutic guideline. The diagnosis included not only diagnosis of child’s family environment but also psychological, sensory integration, pedagogical and speech therapy ones can offer valuable hints for further therapy. The diagnosis was also focused to determine the pathogenesis of the deficiencies, the relationship between the levels of development of various areas, impact on the functioning of the child in the social environment and guidelines for parents to be implemented at home, which included activities that may be done with a child (Fig. 2).

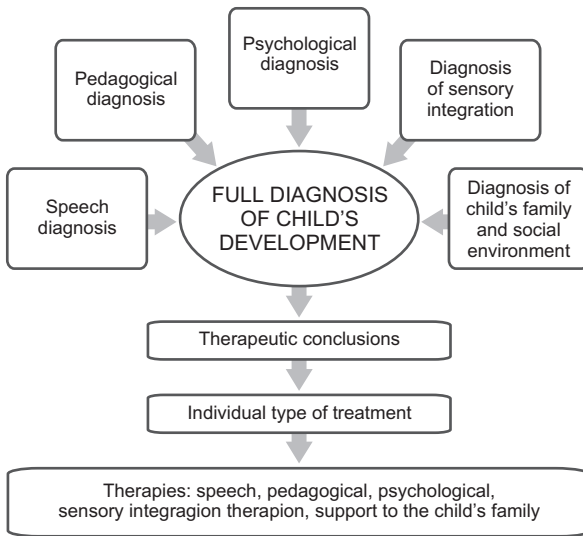


Figure 2. Activities taken to stimulate the child’s development

### Assistance of family in the therapeutic process

A holistic approach to child developmental processes consists not only of therapeutic work with a child, but should also involve parents and the family environment to assist the child in everyday situations. The therapeutic model also requires parents’ commitment in this process, who should be equipped

with the knowledge how to act in different situations, which may be difficult and problematic as such situations are a part of the functioning of each family. Activation of the child's social environment to participate fully in the joy that is raising a child is the next part of therapeutic model of work with children, who show developmental deficiencies.

Everyone who lives in a particular environment is subjected to influences that can be predicted. The biggest impact on a human has, without any doubt, natural social environment, that is a family background. Over the centuries there were different views on the determinants of human psychological development. It was believed that genetic characteristics or the impacts of the environment are important factors that shape the personality. From the moment of birth the child is under the influence of various interactions of the external world, where there is an uncountable number of factors directly or indirectly affected a child and having great importance for their development and becoming a part of society. Parents are the ones who take the most difficult task of educating a young child to be a valuable, responsible person, capable of co-existence and interaction in society.

In the family everybody meets basic biological and emotional needs. Parents primarily cater to the need of love and acceptance, provide a sense of security and at the same time shape the new needs of cognitive, emotional and social development. Parents by constantly assisting their child, provide them with the knowledge of the world and become models of how to behave in specific situations. In family environment a system of values, moral standards, ethical and social ways of behavior are formed. The climate of the family, in which the little man grows, attitudes that parents apply to children, as well as the manner in which they perform their roles, are patterns that child acquires. Impact they have on the child's performance is strong and durable. Hence, parenting require deep preparation. Parenthood cannot be taught, but some knowledge how to fulfill this role in the best possible way may be acquired by each of the parents. At the same time we should remember that the child learns primarily by:

- imitation – parents are models,
- identification – parents are the source of knowledge about the world, are a source of admiration and desire to identify with. The development of the child's personality is affected by parents and their emotional relationship,
- authority – parents establish a hierarchy of values which the child internalizes, they open the child to the "outside world". A child can experience their strength and capabilities, knowing that has support from parents and being able to count on their help.

One of the forms to activate parents was the idea to organize the school for parents<sup>3</sup>, within which there were organized workshops for parents of children participating in the project. Regular meetings were organized for parents, during which there were tackled topics on different aspects of parenting. Meetings with parents took the form of lectures and workshops with time set aside for discussion and exchange of views.

The thematic areas for school for parents were chosen by the people running the lectures and extended for suggestions of parents who actively participated in classes. The topics areas were:

- Training of anger control, how to prevent child's misconduct
- The method of effective parenting by T. Gordon
- Training of social useful behavior in education
- Recognition of cognitive and emotional-social needs, how to build real self-esteem
- Impact of parental attitudes towards children's behavior, recognition, expression and accepting
- Building a parent-child relationships, encouraging a child to cooperate and develop independence
- The educational function of reward and punishment
- Aspects of school maturity, the child's readiness for school education, emotional competences
- The theory of multiple intelligences – ways to develop and examples of therapeutic exercises
- Difficulties in upbringing a child – how to talk and listen to children
- Optimistic kindergarten – presentation of good practices and lesson plans
- The method of Maria Montessori: children's achievement in the development of sensory-motor integration, mental development, the performance of the child's language, social behavior, self-esteem, level of aspiration and a sense of control, learning without fear and participation in the learning process, encouraging and supporting the interests
- The world of children values
- The therapeutic role of fairy tales in the upbringing
- Support in the processes of care and education – key concepts
- Strategies to support children's psychological development.

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<sup>3</sup> There were 48 workshops for parents organized within the project called Career Academy for 3 years old children who have had deficiencies and developmental disorders diagnosed in screening tests. The project was entirely funded by the European Union.

The topics discussed during workshops for parents included a broad spectrum of issues related to some aspects of care and upbringing a child, what aimed to a multi-perspective insight into the processes associated with the development of the child. All parents who participated in the workshops evaluated the course very high, emphasizing their usefulness in gaining the knowledge of the factors affecting upbringing.

The actions focused on raising the parents' awareness considering the process of upbringing a child were combined with therapeutic work which proved the necessity of holistic approach in children education from the third year of age.

The pedagogical results obtained by 153 children who took part in the therapy process are presented below. Nevertheless, one should remember, that all children qualified to participate in the project at the beginning had developmental deficiencies diagnosed during screening tests.

There were three diagnoses in 2012, 2013, 2014<sup>4</sup> which were to examine the children's achievements after the therapeutic periods in pedagogy field.

The aim of pedagogical study was to learn the children's achievements in six areas of social functioning. Pedagogical diagnosis<sup>5</sup> sheet was divided into six parts, each of which referred to a specific sphere of operation of the child's skills and perception.

1. The first part consists of attempts connected with big motor skills, which means the mobility of the child. If the development is progressing smoothly this is an excellent foundation for literacy, concentration, spatial orientation, visual-motor coordination. Motility is not given to us from birth. It should emerge through constant, free but controlled movements and actions by which a child improves the mobility of the body. In order to stimulate properly motor development of the child, one should be sure to start with big motor skills, or develop an overall mobility to move to the development of other motoric skills.
2. Another area diagnosed is the ability to self-empowerment. Children's resourcefulness and abilities in different situations were examined as they lead

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<sup>4</sup> Research conducted in 2012–2014 in Miejski Zespół Poradni Psychologiczno-Pedagogicznych in Kielce for N = 153 within the project called Career Academy for 3 years old children who have had delays and developmental disorders diagnosed in screening tests. The project was entirely funded by the European Union.

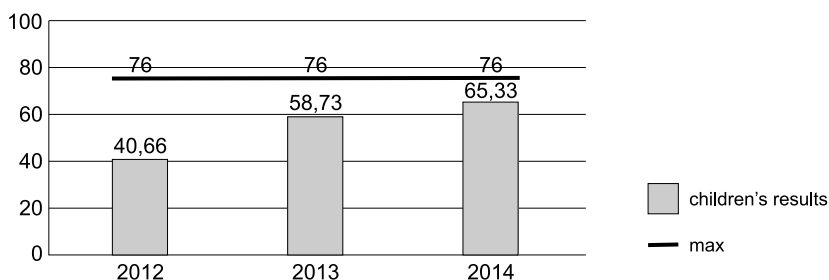
<sup>5</sup> A diagnosis tool sheet was created with the use of expert method by specialists in pedagogy from Miejski Zespół Poradni Psychologiczno-Pedagogicznych in Kielce, there were 22 710 therapeutic hours for all children, out of which 5900 were in pedagogical area.



performance of tasks without the help of adults. Shaping skills in self-service and self-control leads to increasing the efficiency of the child performance in everyday situations.

3. The third part of the diagnosis concerns the recognition of fine motor and refers to dexterity. Hand functions are important not only for everyday activities, but also lead to the ability of writing. It is important whether and how the child controls the movements of the hands and fingers, if can grasp objects with one hand (without help), can manipulate the object to perform a task, and if movements of both hands are coordinated.
4. Visual perception is the ability to recognize and differentiate visual stimuli and examine visual-motor coordination. Here the therapist checks the ability to harmonize eye movements with the movements of the body or the selected part of it. Such coordination is the basis for ability to work and learn.
5. The next part of the diagnosis is an auditory perception, understanding of speech and the implementation of sound (correct articulation) and the mastery of reading and writing skills. Gaining information how the child hears, what they hear, and how receive sounds is important in this task.
6. Mathematical skills are the last part of the diagnosis and give an answer to the question of whether and how the child is prepared to learn mathematics, and shows so-called mathematical maturity.

The results in pedagogy field are presented<sup>6</sup> below:



Achievements in pedagogical area

During the first diagnosis in 2012 the results were below 50% of maximum number of possible points to gain. After a year of pedagogical therapy the re-

<sup>6</sup> 5900 hours of therapy were in pedagogical area which were conducted with children within a project and the achievements are presented in the analysis.

sults show the raise in children's performance and it was 77,2%. In the third year of project duration the children's performance was at the level of 86%.

This study has various practical implications. On the one side, it is important to spread its results into the field of widely understood child and family support, mostly directed to therapists, educators and parents, with the aim of making them aware of the fact early intervention in child's development may reduce developmental deficiencies and allow children achieve school maturity. On the other side, parents' participation in the therapeutic programs aimed at building their guardian's awareness and consciousness may increase the therapeutic results.

## Conclusions

An important area of the effectiveness in compensating deficiencies that may appear at the early age of development is the profound diagnosis of child's functioning in the social environment connected with the diagnosis of family background. Having such an research data specialists can create an individualized plan of therapies for a child. Parallel to the therapy with the child, family members should be activated, as only in this way the effects of therapeutic efforts will be synergic.

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## SUMMARY

An important area of the effectiveness in offsetting deficiencies that may appear in early childhood development is a multi-specialty diagnosis of the child's functioning in a social environment with a diagnosis of the child's family situation. With such

a diagnosis a team of specialists can create an individual treatment plan for the child. Parallel to work with your child should proceed activation of the family, because only in this way one can achieve synergistic effects.

**KEY WORDS:** holistic approach to the development of a child, therapy, cooperation with the family background.

## STRESZCZENIE

Ważnym obszarem skuteczności działań w kompensowaniu braków, które mogą pojawić się we wczesnym rozwoju dziecka, jest wielospecjalistyczna diagnoza funkcjonowania dziecka w środowisku społecznym wraz z diagnozą sytuacji rodzinnej dziecka. Mając taką diagnozę, zespół specjalistów może stworzyć indywidualny plan terapii dla dziecka. Równoległe do pracy z dzieckiem powinna przebiegać aktywizacja rodziny, ponieważ tylko w ten sposób można uzyskać efekty synergiczne.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** holistyczne podejście do rozwoju dziecka, terapia, współpraca z środowiskiem rodzinnym dziecka.