



# The role of Research Institute for Child Psychology and Pathopsychology in the care of gifted children in Slovakia



Eva Farkašová, Vladimír Dočkal

In course of 50-years history of Research Institute for Child Psychology and Pathopsychology, a great deal of activities has been devoted to the issues of **gifted and talented children**, mainly from the 70-ties. The **researches** have dealt with:

- » various types of giftedness,
- » giftedness of children from pre-school age to teenagers,
- » teaching and learning in different educational types (inclusive and/or detached education),
- » and in different school stages (kindergarten, primary school, grammar school, vocational school).

**Art, sport, mathematical and linguistic talents were observed from various points of view:**

- » cognitive and personal development,
- » structure of intellectual abilities,
- » personal and motivational factors,
- » which child's attributes and qualities are applied and employed in the course of their development,
- » which of them and to what extent they conduce to resultant state and pattern of individuals.

**Giftedness** has been considered as a dynamic variable, i.e. it is not static and non-changeable phenomenon - vice-versa: it can be developed positively, but also in a decreasing way (under unfavourable conditions). It consists of instrumental and performance components. The instrumental part means mostly innate factors (hereditary preconditions and innate characteristics), though these factors can be modified to a certain extent by one's activities

and aspirations. Performance aspects are influenced by personal qualities and the background - family and broader social conditions. All these variables have been followed and combined to create an optimal base for further development/improvement of individual children.

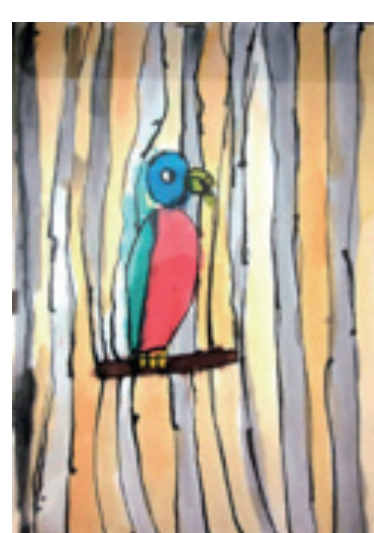
Our outcomes contributed to scientific knowledge and flowed into practical proposals as well:

- » suggestions of forms, extent and content of learning practices,
- » designs of proper ways for treatment of various accompanying specifics in children (physical, medical, psychical and mental specifics, or difficulties) and in their settings (family, school, peers),
- » suggestions of legislative regulations regarding necessary modifications and transformations in favour of gifted pupils form a very important part of our achievement
- » specific materials were worked out during the years (some of them - in cooperation with specialists from other institutions), e.g.:

- **Achievement motivation questionnaire** (Dotazník motivácie výkonu) - modified for primary school pupils in Slovakia;
- **Foreign language abilities test** (Test cudzojazyčných schopností) - created for children at the beginning of the school attendance;
- **Text - and work books for foreign language learning** (+ handbook for teachers) - for children aged 5 to 8 (Jazyky hrou / Languages by playing); and for above-average primary school pupils (Cudzie jazyky pre každého prváka. Bobo, Zuzka a ich kamaráti / Foreign languages for each first-grader. Bobo, Zuzka and their friends); both materials are prepared in English and German.



The research and applied activities have been stepwise a bit shifted and focused on the issues of general intellectual abilities and linguistic development in connection with foreign language teaching and learning factors.



**General intellectual abilities** are topical in our research and applied work.

The first and main question in the given sphere consists of issues of a proper identification - choice of adequate means - psychological tests, resp. other procedures in dependence on the type of giftedness. Continuously, several methods were applied, adopted and verified - mostly undertaken from foreign sources (had to undergo the standardization in our settings) and worked out in our Institute (see above).

A system of distinct gifted pupils' education represented a traditional form in Slovakia for many years. Special classes and schools were constituted for particular types of giftedness (mathematics, science, language, art, sports, etc.). A system of **gifted pupils' integrative education** - its specifics, suitable arrangement, necessary conditions, and modification of content (curriculum), forms and other related matters were created, suggested and verified in frames of an

experiment in primary schools in different parts of the country. A need for the acquaintance of teachers involved how to approach to gifted pupils in case of the standard class situation, how to adopt and differentiate the process formed the special issue - seminars and counselling during the experimental procedure. Another outcome consists in **continual education of teachers, psychologists and special pedagogues** in a scope of care, development and creation of supporting conditions for children and pupils in the educational process.



**Foreign languages learning (FLL) from the 1st grade of primary school** is not a "countrywide" practice. It can be incorporated into school curricula, if the school conditions are properly arranged and can secure personal and other specifications. Parents have a great interest in this type of education. In

some cases, there is a higher number of people concerned than the school can accept - that is why a kind of "selection" has to be done. As the FLL is a more demanding type of education, it might not be suitable for all children at the age of 6 - there can be some physical, emotional, personal and/or mental difficulties and objections, so it must be considered carefully what is the best for a



child before he/she would experience unsuccessful due to bad coping with the educational demands. Informative psycho-diagnostic methods used in the case consist of the School readiness test (administered in small groups) and the above mentioned Foreign language abilities test (individual administration); the third method is an individual structured conversation with children (in Slovak). A combination of the results serves as a basis for prediction of possible functioning of the child in the educational process.

## Summary

Research Institute for Child Psychology and Pathopsychology represents the key position in systematic dealing with different issues of child development, their optimal wellbeing by utilisation of the individual potentialities, and gifted children nurturing and support form a plumbless and unsubstitutable component of the research activities. The results proved that they create an important contribution to scientific knowledge and to practical area - education in a wide scope, focused on the child's needs and interests.

