

The proposed project fits into world-wide, popular research on the development of theory of mind in children. Theory of mind is defined as an ability to understand mental states, i.e. other peoples' thoughts, beliefs, intentions, and to distinguish them from one's own mental state. Its beginnings can be found in Piaget's theory of decentration. However, the notion of "theory of mind" itself emerged in the 1970s. Some basic abilities connected to theory of mind in normally developing children are present in their fifth year of life. However, in children with developmental disorders, such as children with autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disabilities, hearing or language impairments, theory of mind emerges after a significant delay. Despite the fact that the process of the development of theory of mind, also in diversified groups with respect to cognitive and social development, age, or culture of origin, has been, and still is, analyzed in many studies, there is a shortage of analyses of the consequences of having a better developed theory of mind. That is why, in our study, we would like to undertake this task, paying special attention to those consequences, which seem, in our opinion, to be the most important for the child's functioning. There are not many such studies, despite the fact that scholars agree that theory of mind is not only a theoretical construct, but also that it has a practical significance for everyday functioning, and for the well-being of the individual. In the existing studies on this topic there is a visible lack of analyses done with children with disabilities.

Our idea emerges from critical reflection on existing results of studies on the consequences of having a better developed theory of mind. In our project, we would like to pay attention to four main areas, which seem to us exceptionally important for the future functioning of the child among peers and in society. We would like to check, whether a better developed theory of mind in children allows prediction of: more accurate understanding of relations in the social world, more accurate self-perception, more frequent prosocial behavior, and better school achievement. Some of these issues have already been analyzed, but with younger children than our participants. Moreover, the relations and explanations analyzed seem incomplete and unclear to us. In our study, we plan to have two groups of children with disabilities. Other studies show that children with mild intellectual disabilities and children with hearing impairments have problems developing theory of mind. We would like to check whether in these two groups assumed relations have similar character in comparison to the group of children without disabilities.

This study is planned as a continuation of a longitudinal study, which is currently financed by the National Science Centre, in which we analyze how theory of mind develops among children without disabilities, children with mild intellectual disabilities, and children with hearing impairments, from different educational settings. In the current project, there are three measurement times, every 9–10 months, connected to theory of mind and to factors which can influence its development. In the next study, in the same group of children, we would like to conduct two additional measurements with the same frequency, checking the consequences of having a better developed theory of mind. The participants are older than children who take part in other studies: these children are in their middle childhood, experiencing the transition from early school education to the study of other subjects, when expectations and requirements change and increase.

The results of the project can be an important premise supporting the need to develop theory of mind among children, especially those, among whom theory of mind develops slower than among their peers.