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# **Encoded For Kindness: Beyond Order and Chaos**

"You are the world".

Krishnamurti (McTaggart, 2008, p. 97)

#### Abstract

We have forgotten the essential nature of childhood. Such an adult has not discovered that in their loss of playfulness maturity is only reached by becoming once again like a child who gives up the need of relentless conflicting, grasping and clinging in an attempt to coerce the world. Love is the basis for original play and optimal learning. Children's original play demonstrates that this sense of kindness is one of the most important discoveries in neuroscience; we are hardwired to connect. A loving brain becomes serves as the basis both for our long range biological survival and for our cultural advancement. Such a prosocial brain creates a different emotional framework and an alternative safe physical response with which to receive the world. With these new physical and emotional skills we create different kind of relationships.

Keywords: love, kindness, childhood, neuroplasticity, connection.

#### **Introduction: Our Original Kindness**

"The trouble with the world is that we draw our family circle too small".

Mother Teresa (Kornfield, 2009, p. 354)

One day I was arranging some thin mats on the concrete floor in a corner of a corridor in Pollsmoor Prison in Cape Town, South Africa. Small groups of prisoners walked by. Most took no outward notice of me. One tall young man in a blue prison jumpsuit stopped. He looked at me as if I were totally out of place. In the prison everyone knows their place. Here is a white guy all alone sitting on the floor in a secluded hallway. No guards were around. He asked me, "Who are you? Do you know who we are? We are murderers, rapists, drug dealers". I just smiled and crawled toward him and nudged his legs. He smiled a huge smile. I tackled him and we rolled together on the mats. He laughed and squirmed out of my grasp. When he stood up he laughingly said, "OK! OK! I get it". We shook hands and he ran to catch up with the other prisoners.

I never told him who I was. I showed him who I am. My sudden behavioral answer to his question brought us out of our categories. For the briefest of times we were without categories,not white, not Black, not prisoner, not stranger, not American, not South African. What happened? Original play short-circuited our differences and helped us see each other as we really are. In doing so we regained our humanity.

Humans are like words; our meaning is in our connections. Like words taken out of context when we lose our connections we lose the fullness of our meaning. As neuroscientist Gregory Berns (2008, 58) points out, "Categories are death to imagination". Artist Bob Miller (Cole, 2006, 74) agrees pointing out that, "There is no graver threat to the process of discovery than that dread disease «hardening of the categories»". There is a story of how Mother Teresa (1987, 45) was able to see beyond categories to care for an elderly woman. This old woman who was dying on the streets of Calcutta said that she could not be touched by anyone other than a Brahmin. As Mother Teresa was about to touch her the woman asked if she was a Brahmin. Mother Teresa asked herself "Who is a Brahmin? I felt anyone who serves his people is a good Brahmin so I said, «Yes, I'm a Brahmin»". Mother Teresa brought her to the home.

As is the case with all seminal discoveries, like quantum theory, it is precisely the dissociation of categories necessary in normal human experience, that is required, namely the ability to conceive what cannot in principle be imagined nor expressed in ordinary language. Newton, Copernicus, Einstein all sustained visions of a unified, harmonious world. As Thomas Merton (Kornfield, 2008, 11) points out, "If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed..."

Suppose there is a way tofeel such kindness for each other. And suppose further that the answer we've been seeking lies with children. Polish doctor and educator Janusz Korczak also had such a vision; he thought of children as the salvation of the world.

The purpose of this article is to confirm Korczak's insight about children's value and demonstrate that children's worth is absolute and incalculable. In their original play childrenhave demonstrated loving kindness that exists at the core of life. As five-year-old David told me, "Play is when we don't know that we are different from each other".

#### **Forgetting Who We Are**

"When the devil will we stop prescribing aspirin for poverty, exploitation, lawlessness, and crime?".

Janusz Korczak (Lifton, 1988, 47)

We have forgotten the essential nature of childhood. Consequently, H.H. The Dalai Lama (Davidson & Harrington, 2002, 66) feels that we have seriously lost touch with our fundamental humanity. The adult who has forgotten what it means to be a child, who gives little evidence of ever having been a child, is not the wiser for it. Too often what we infer to be maturity is nothing more than an adolescent attempt to win at the game of life. Such an adult has not discovered that in their loss of playfulness maturity is only reached by becoming once again like a child who gives up the need of relentless conflicting, grasping and clinging in an attempt to coerce the world.

We believe so deeply in our limited and impoverished contest identity that it has become habitual. Fault lines of conflict crisscross and rupture across the structure of human life and its institutions. Competition becomes the ruling principle and active ritual in the economic, political, social, and personal aspects of our lives. We become well adapted to the needs and dictates of the contest social system, which we carry out with a terrifying disconnect from the lives we impact.

We teach children what we know, and what we know is conflict. We believe in the efficacy and inevitablity of conflict as the basis for human life. As Arch-Bishop Tutu (2010, 6) of South Africa put it, "we seem almost to be programmed to have our identity defined by our againstness". We assume, in fact, that in terms of evolution humans have gone as far as we can go. We can, in such a view, only affirm our humanity *against* another. Not knowing what else to do we pass this inheritance on to our children as if it were a treasured relic.The successful child, made to feel happy in his or her grasping, made content in its membership, and made complacent in the face of inner terror, nourishes an environment that thrives on the ruin of childhood.

This culture of contest is the foundation of our edcational system with devastating results for children. Children in Los Angeles, for example, often display symptoms people associate with combat veterans. In the Los Angeles Unified School District, Marleen Wong (August 11, 2003) found that 9 out of 10 children she surveyed had been punched, shot at, threatened with a gun or a knife or seen someone hit, shot, or stabbed. It is not only children's bodies, mindsand spirits that are damaged by violence, but also their DNA (Brown, 2012). More recently the United Nations children's agency UNICEF declared 2014 a devastating year for children.

Children pay a tremendousprice for our fear and greed. Deprived of their original sense of kindness Children must learn to suppress their inner need to trust life.Intimidation and violence are internalized in the reflexive habits of a lifetime's experiences and expectations of aggression and victimization. For example, M. is ten years old, near the top of her fourth grade class. She dreams of being a doctor. But like so many children in India and other countries it looks as if her dream will be destroyed into a nightmare of childhood prostitution. India is the center of the 21<sup>st</sup> century slave trade. M.'s parents have pulled her out of school and returned her to her native village. The worry is that her famiy will sell her to traffikers to be sent to a red-light district anywhere in India. Too often children such as M. are faces on the covers of *Time* and UNESCO publications where they remain remote and without substance. Kristof, (December 1, 2008) reports that M. is one of an estimated 1,8 million children who enter the sex trade every year. How do we cope with such numbers? We organize commissions and write reports. Children become statistics by putting them in studies, tables, charts, and graphs. Our clever words and numbers allow children to disappear between the lines.

If we want optimal learning for our children we have to think differently, in ways we haven't thought before. As Einstein pointed out, "We cannot use the methods to solve our problems that created the problems in the first place".

#### **Remembering Our InherentKindness**

"How are we educated by children, by animals! involved, we live in the currents of universal reciprocity".

Martin Buber, (1923, 32)

Recently I played with young deaf children at an Austrian school. Following the session a mother who watched me play with her daughter said to me with tears in her eyes, "there's just so much loving in this play".

In a California school six-year-old Travis looks upin the midst of our play at his Mother sitting near us and exclaims, "Look Mom, I'm falling in love".

After his play session a five-year-old boy in Warsaw, Poland says that, "Real play is when no one is crying and no one has a broken heart".

This mother and two boys capture the essence of original play and in doing so grasp what Viktor Frankl (Vardey, 1995, p. 337) described as the greatest secret that human thought and belief have to impart: *The salvation of man is through love and in love*" (italics author's).

Love is the basis for original play and optimal learning. H.H. the Dalai Lama (2002, 71) points out that "the brain cannot develop properly and people cannot be healthy in the absence of human affection". There is a growing body of scien-

tific evidence which suggests that the quality of care and affection that children receive as they grow up has a direct bearing on their mental and emotional development. When love encounters fear the result is compassion. When love meets difference the result is kindness. When love touches pain the result is healing. When love surrounds isolation and separation the result is belonging.

This sense of kindness has been felt and described by many with a rich variety of linguistic, scientific, and spiritual descriptions. St Paul said that, "we are members of one another". Robert Oppenheimer, Neils Bohr, Carl Jung, John Lilly, Albert Einstein and Edwin Schrödinger are among the prominent scientific figures who felt this sense of belonging. Schrödinger (Weber, 1986, xv) describes a oneness of all things in which individual life and all other conscious beings "are all in all". Biologist Edwin Chargaff (Newberg, 2001, 154) adds that, " If [a scientist] has not experienced, at least a few times in his life, this cold shudder down his spine, this confrontation with an immense, invisible face whose breath moves him to tears, he is not a scientist".

To Archbishop Desmond Tutu (2004, 68–9) this belonging is called *Ubuntu*, "to have what it takes to be a human being... one whose humanity is caught up in your humanity". For the Dalai Lama it is a feeling of interdependence, in which he is connected in such a way that his personal boundaries dissolve. Plant biologist, Barbara McClintock (Fox, 1983, 198) for decades was virtually alone in her view that "basically everything is one". Physicist David Bohm (Weber, 1986, 107) agrees saying, "Deep down the consciousness of mankind is one".

Children's original play demonstrates that this sense of kindness is one of the most important discoveries in neuroscience; we are hardwired to connect. H.H. The Dalai Lama (Davidson & Harrington, 2002, 66) argues that the basic human nature is compassionate, loving kindness and that its importance and effectiveness have now been established from the scientific standpoint. Original play is an innate pattern of kindness that not only recognizes that all life is of only one kind, but embodies an emergent pattern of behavior that sustains this sense of life's deep belonging.

While many scientists and sages acknowledge that a sustaining pattern of unity exists in life, they haven't known how to develop it. Nor do they know where to look to find it. H.H. the Dalai Lama (Davidson & Harrington 2002, 73), for example, writes that he doesn't have any particular ideas as to what specific techniques might be used to bring about this pattern in children. Psychologist Paul Ekman (Goleman, 2003, 148) also does not have any suggestions as to what practices can shorten the refractory period in fear. Scientist Steven Strogatz (2003, 259) points out that "we still know almost nothing about the laws governing the interactions between genes, or proteains, or people".

Optimal learning emerges from a safe, loving pattern of human interaction. As Candace Pert (2006, 49) points out, "There's tons of data showing that you can't grasp new information in a state of fear". Goleman (2006, 36) suggests

that, "In effect, being chronically hurt and angered, or being emotionally nourished, by someone we spend time with daily over the course of years can refashion our brain". Research indicates that a loving affectionate connection to even one person can limit or counteract much of the damage done by negative environments (Garmezy & Rutter, 1983). As Siegel (2007, 99) points out this pattern, "...is a re-creation because children early on have this receptivity, this playfullness of being". As Gardner (1993, 32) points out, "when it comes to the forging of new understandings and the creation of new worlds, childhood can be a very powerful ally". Janusz Korczak understood this.

That children's original play can help us solve a serious problem is a radical notion.Original play's kindness destructures, deprograms and deconditions fear making whole new orientations possible. Original play promotes neural plasticity and strengthens specific neurological circuits that generate peacefulness, awareness, and compassion. With practice seconds of kindness can be stabilized into temperaments becoming familiar and effortless. Original play taps into implicit, hard-wired capacities of our native kindness. The recent findings of neuro plasticity suggest that we can remodel our neuro networks and indeed can train ourselves to be more kind, more compassionate beings. Research also indicates that as Siegel (2007, 99) puts it, "the resonance circuits have been shown to not only encode intention, but also to be fundamentally involved in human empathy, and also in emotional resonance, the outcome of attunement of minds". Iacobini (2009, 267) has called mirror neurons the cells in our brains that make our experience of others deeply meaningful. He continues, "They show that we are not alone, but are biologically wired and evolutionarily designed to be deeply wiring connects us all at our common human core". "We are, as Desmond Tutu (2010, 6) put it, "programmed – no hard-wired – for goodness". This means that at a neural level our brains can encode not only what we physically see, but the intention that we imagine. Daniel Siegel suggests that, "In the next now, what happens actually matches what our mirror neuron system anticipated and the coherence between that anticiption and the map of what interconnected with one another". Daniel Goleman (2006, 36) adds that, "The social brain actually creates a profound state of coherence".

Creation has provided us with a core neuro pattern recognition system that allows us to access life's love and sense of kindness. It may not seem like a big thing in the educational process. But as Mother Teresa has said, "Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love". Originalplay is Creation's highest spiritual expression and it is an urgent, practical love, that when activated is expressed as kindness. Kindness is life's first principle. Behind the apparent diversity of life lies a hidden symmetry, life's common sense of kindness. Siegel asserts that, "Kindness is to our relationships, on this precious and precarious planet, what breath is to life". There are many ways of nurturing and sustaining this sense of kindness. Dr. Korczak, for example, brought this sense of loving kindnessto the attention of his students in medical school. He titled his first lecture of his seminar, "The Heart of the Child". It was held in the X-ray room of the Children's hospital in Warsaw. Dr. Korczal entered the room holding the hand of a small boy. Without talking, Korczak took off the boy's shirt, placed him behind the fluoroscope and turned off the overhead light.Everyone could see the boy's heart beating rapidly on the screen. "«Don't ever forget this sight», Korczak told them. «Before you raise a hand to a child, before you administer any kind of punishment, remember what his frightened heart looks like»" (Lifton, 1988, 148).

Here are four examples of the use of original play to nurture and sustain love and kindness in school settings. These children have taught me in the only ways that they could.

A few years ago a mother and son came to one of my play sessions in southern Poland. We sat down on the mats and the mother said that her son wanted to ask me something but didn't speak English well enough so she would translate. She began to tell me that her son, who is ten, was being mobbed at school by a larger boy who pushed him down. He was not physically hurt, but he was embarrassed. As his mother was talking her son shifted, looked down at the floor, and began to cry. He added details in Polish as his Mother translated. At first he was afraid to tell anyone at school because when he had done so in the past it only made things worse. When he did finally tell his teacher she did nothing to help. The bullying continued and now he is also known as a tattletale. He doesn't want to fight but doesn't know what else to do.

I invited him to stand up with me. His mother watched and translatedwhen necessary. Lesson number one was falling down. I told him that it was important to know how to fall, but even more important was getting up. I told him that at first falling down was hard for me. I had forgotten how to fall and was re-taught by a ten-year-old boy with autism. He smiled. I said that most people fall *over* like trees. Instead of falling *over* the idea is to fall *down*, as if you were a cobra uncoiling to the ground.

I asked him to push me just the way he was pushed at school. I received his push and rolled down and backwards. I had him push me a number of times. He seemed to enjoy pushing me down. Now it was his turn. I showed him how I was falling down. I was using the aikido back roll and the uncoiling that the boy with autism taught me. Once he practiced this a number of times he was ready for the second part of the lesson – how to enter and receive the push. It was clear from his description that he was waiting for the boy to push him. Instead of waiting to be pushed I suggested that he walk toward the boy to receive the push.As he stepped forward he was to reach out and gently touch under the boy's arms. This slightly raises the attacker's arms so that the power was directed up higher on the shoulder. Simultaneously, reaching out changes the angle

of the shoulder thus lessening the impact of the push. Finally, immediately after falling he was to reach out with one hand toward the boy who pushed him. When this happens so quickly the other boy's reflex is to reach out to "help" him up. He seemed puzzled by this but quickly caught on to what I was suggesting.

When we finished we sat on the mat together with his mother. I told him that I was not teaching him a form of self-defense. Original play is different. There is a big difference between weakness and softness and between waiting to be pushed and entering to receive a push. I told him that during the next two weeks we would continue to practice during our play sessions and that I was going to look for him and whenever and wherever I found him I was going to come up and push him. When his mother translated this his eyes got big and he smiled. He seemed very excited as if he was looking forward to being pushed.

Together we accomplished two things. First, we changed his mind about falling. Then we gave him the skill of falling. He had now a different emotional framework and an alternative safe physical response with which to receive the bully. With his new physical and emotional skills he would create a different kind of relationship.

\* \* \*

"To: Fred

From: Hector

When you come in June find a message from me. Also I like playing with you and thank you for showing me how to be strong".

This is a note given by Hector to his school counselor for me. He was one of eight young men in a East Los Angeles junior high. Their school counselor asked me to come and play with them because they never went to class. They spent their days hanging out in her office. I came to be with them for three hours each Friday for ten weeks.

On my first visit I walked into the area where the boys were lounging. I sat down and spread some  $8 \times 10$  photos of me playing with wolves on the floor. One of the boys looked over and asked if that was me playing with the dogs. I replied that it was, but they weren't dogs. They were wolves. That got their attention. Now, all of the boys came over to look. They got down and passed the photos around. One of the boys asked me, "How do you do that?".

That was the question I was waiting for. I said, "Come, I'll show you." I led the boys onto a small area of enclosed lawn next to the counselor's office. When I got to the grass, I immediately got down on my hands and knees and crawled among them. They laughed, pushed at me and spoke in Spanish. It didn't take long until one-by-one they jumped on me and we began to play on the grass.

On this initial visit, Hector was hesitant. He watched some of the other boys play with me. He smiled and laughed a lot. He was wearing an ankle length black leather coat. This was June in the San Fernando Valley of Southern California. The afternoon temperatures were in the high 90's. Finally, he took off his coat and jumped on me. Hector was a big boy, about six feet and 200 pounds. Werolled and tussled on the grass.

Before I came back for our second play session, his counselor called me and said she wanted to tell me about Hector. She said that he had worn that trench coat every day to school since September. She called it his shield. But after our first play session he left it home. He no longer needed his leather shield. He discovered another source of strength.Hector found a choice he never knew he had. He could escape from the model of conflict.

We have been told that love "bears all things" and "endures all things". Such admonitions seemed to be the stuff of saints, sages, and children's stories but not realistic suggestions for me. Then I met Danny who taught me the living meaning of such love.

When I met Danny he was an abused boy of about four. He had been forced to live with the family dogs. He ate and drank out of the dog dishes and slept in the doghouse. When he first came to the school he could not handle the group activities, nor could he sit quietly and wait for his turn. When he was upset he scratched and bit. He was too aggressive for the teachers. So, I was assigned to be with him throughout his half day at school. We spent much of our time playing outside. When he or I felt he could handle it he went inside to join his class. In time he began to be able to manage the routine of kindergarten.

One day I was carrying him to his school bus. He didn't want to go back to the institution where he was living. Out of anger and frustration he lunged forward and bit through my cheek. I felt instant intense pain but somehow immediately gave him love through my injured cheek. He raised his head and looked at me and put his head on my shoulder. All of this happened so quickly that it was as if it was only one moment. We gazed into each other's eyes and I was aware of a deeper connection, our deeper humanity. I hugged him and carried him to his seat on the school bus. I buckled him in and sat with him until the bus had to leave. When I walked into the school I was crying. Seeing my blood and tears a staff member looked at me and commented, "Fred really got it this time". The staff was used to seeing me with a bloody nose or bite, but they had not seen me crying. I sat down and realized that my tears were not from the pain but from a realization of the lesson Danny gave me about love. As soon as I loved him he stopped biting. At the point of loving there was no moreattack.

Dannyshared with me the pattern that is at the very heart of original playgiving love at the point of attack. What happened? Intense, passionate feelings of love can provide amazingly effective pain relief. "It turns out that the areas of the brain activated by intense love are the same areas that drugs use to reduce pain," said Arthur Aron, PhD (April, 1997), a professor of psychology at State University of New York at Stony BrookOr was it that my tears were ones of humility as I realized that through no efforts of my own I had received a great gift that I did not understand. St. Teresa of Avila describes so well what I felt, "The will is fully occupied in loving, but it doesn't understand how it loves. The intellect, if it understands, doesn't understand how it understands; at least it can't comprehend anything of what it understands. It doesn't seem to me that it understands, because, as I say, it doesn't understand – I really can't understand this!".

Danny taught me this lesson in the only way he could, perhaps the only way that I could learn it. Original play is not an abstract ideal, but a flesh and blood response to the world. My cheek was bleeding, but not my heart. The application of love at the point of attack is the heart's wisdom. Danny demonstrated in a most compelling way the meaning of Jesus' teaching of his often quoted admonition to his followers in the Sermon on the Mount to "turn the other cheek" (Matt. 5: 39). By literally "turning the other cheek" I bring to bear on my injury not the hurt side of myself, but a fresh, uninjured, aspect previously unknown. This is not as some would imagine that I am inviting a second bite. In fact, as Danny's reaction demonstratedwe now had a new relationship. This is giving love at the point of attack. I realized then that flesh and blood needs a loving, compassionate heart far more than a just, punishing mind. Danny and I made conflict obsolete and in so doing we had discovered the true roots of our shared humanity.

To those who have the courage to allow love to guide their actions; love has a fierce clarity and certainty that no cross-examination by pure reason can shake. I walked into a classroom at 9 am. Sitting on the floor were a teacher a mother and a small boy who was crying very hard and desperately holding on to his mother. This was his second day at school. The teacher took him and he tried to reach to hold his mother who was also crying. She told him that she would come back at lunchtime. She left the room. The teacher stood with the little boy. He was two and a half. He and his family were from Southeast Asia. He has autism. As the teacher walked near me, the boy reached out with his arms to me. I took him and walked outside. As I came to the door another teacherwalked past me and whispered, "I hope you are not going to do that for long. We don't have time for that". She's right and she's wrong. According to the school's daily plan. There's no place in his IEP (Individual Education Plan) for giving love. She's also very wrong. For without the feelings of love and safety the little boy's ability to learn is impaired. Rumihad it right, "Gamble everything for love, if you're a true human being if not, leave this gathering".

I took the time. We walked outside and I held him until his sobbing quieted and his hold on me softened. Then I sat on the ground andcuddled him in my lap. In time he shifted his position so he could look around the playground. Other kids came by to say hi and hug me. He stood up and walked a few steps away and quickly turned to see if I was still there. I was still there. I waved. He smiled and ventured a little further. Little by little he walked further away to explore and return for a hug. Each time going a bit further. Eventually he replaced his return trip to me with a reassuring look. We played together for 2 hours. When I returned him to his teacher he scampered off to join his class. Each day I came to his class, he spent less and less time with me and grew increasingly comfortable in the classroom.

#### **Conclusion: First Things First**

...to him that is joined to all the living there is hope.

**Ecclesiastes 9:4** 

"For you not to be laughing and playing during some part of every day is unnatural and goes against your fundamental biochemistry".

(Pert, 2006, p, 209-10)

"Dare to Dream".

Janusz Korczak, (Lifton, 18988, 70)

One day while playing with a group of young children on the Navaho reservation a Navaho elder stopped and observed our play. When I was finished he motioned for me to join him. He smiled and said that "watching you play with the children is like watching flowers grow". The elder understood that original play is a pattern of relatedness within the human spirit. When we belong we feel our proper place in life's scheme of things. When we play we are initiated into the most expansive, inclusive circle of kindness possible.

The question is not whether there is time for love. Rather, it is to say "first things first". Play's perspective does not deny the culture's interest, but it sees beyond it to the truest expression of life's spirit. A loving brain becomes as Dr. James Austin (1998, 567) points out, "a resource which could serve as the basis both for our long range biological survival and for our cultural advancement". Albert Einstein (Isaacson, 2007, 382) in an exchange of letters with Sigmund Freud posed a question, "Is it possible to control man's mental evolution so as to make him secure against the psychosis of hate and destructiveness?". My experience with children in original play provides an emphatic "Yes!" to his question.

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### Zaprogramowani na dobroć: poza porządkiem i chaosem

#### Streszczenie

Zapomnieliśmy, jaka jest zasadnicza natura dzieciństwa. Dorosły nie odkrył jeszcze, że tracąc zdolność zabawy, dojrzałość osiąga ponownie jak "dziecko". Ono bowiem poddaje się potrzebie nieustępliwego wchodzenia w konflikty, zachłannie i kurczowo próbując zawładnąć światem. Miłość jest fundamentem dla zabawy pierwotnej i dla optymalnego uczenia się. Dziecięca zabawa pierwotna ukazuje, że poczucie dobroci jest jednym z najważniejszych odkryć w naukach neurologicznych; jesteśmy zaprogramowani na połączenie się. Kochający mózg służy jako baza zarówno dla naszego długoterminowego biologicznego przeżycia, jak i dla naszego rozwoju kulturowego. Taki prospołeczny mózg wytwarza inny rodzaj struktur emocjonalnych i alternatywną, bezpieczną fizycznie reakcję, którą odpowiada na świat. Używając tych nowych fizycznych i emocjonalnych umiejętności, stwarzamy odmienny rodzaj relacji międzyludzkich.

Słowa kluczowe: miłość, dobroć, dzieciństwo, plastyczność neuronów, połączenie.