

To give and receive love – the role of Original Play® in practice and educational theory

Jolanta Graczykowska, 2010

“Take Time To Play

Take Time To Love And Be Loved”

Mother Teresa’s Home for Children in Calcutta

Introduction

I have been experiencing the nature of process of Original Play for seven years. During this time I have played with about 8,000 children and teenagers in different parts of the world. These were both correctly developed children and those with various educational and developmental problems such as aggression, hyperactivity disorder, autism, cerebral palsy, Down’s syndrome, hearing and visually impaired. Among them were also children who have experienced cruelty and traumatic situations not only from adults but also their parents.

I have decided to take up the topic of giving and receiving love and the role of Original Play ® in this area for the following reasons. First of all, feeling of love is the most important and powerful message which the Original Play gives. Second of all, I observe and encounter problems and difficulties in children-parents relations. I get the impression that adults instead of finding the causes of problems like aggression, violence and badly-mannered children, concentrate on symptoms not on factors which caused them. They use methods based on fight, self-defense or running away from the problem. It reminds me of an exercise which O.F.Donaldson demonstrates during his lectures. Regardless of the country or nationality of people doing this – the result is the same. Whenever someone pushes their fist against our open hand, we usually try to fight back using our strength, or we become the victim of this situation, alternatively run away from it and defend ourselves. Thirdly, you cannot talk about subjectivity without talking about human and love. Finally, in my opinion it is necessary to perceive subjectivity and education not only in theory but most importantly in practice. Such action requires appropriate conditions, competence and teaching skills.

Love – subjectivity – educational practice

Love and its realization in human’s life is the most important topic for research in many fields of science. It is said that love is the indicator of subjectivity. Educational process would not be possible without it, and real upbringing takes place through

love and for love. Love should be the basis for relation tutor-student. (J.Korczak, 1984; M.Łopatkowa,1992).

Love is one of the most basic psychological needs of a child. Its fulfillment is connected directly with the family. Undoubtedly, people should experience, learn and give love in the family, as the place where our perception of love is formed. When children's basic psychological needs are satisfied in the family – among them are acceptance and love – they have a foundation for good social relations in life and respect for others. Parents who are closely attached and sensitive to their children's needs transfer emotional messages according to which a child reacts. As research, media and my own observations suggest, children very often do not experience love in their families, but quite the opposite – they experience lack of love. I observe that parents and teachers have difficulty with expressing and giving love, as well as identifying signals when they are given love by children. Unfortunately, love is perceived as something abstract, it is limited to verbal declarations and conviction that we love our children. However, talking about love does not mean feeling it.

School is second most important environment which influences children's personality and where their system of value is formed. To a large extent schools are filled with children who have a considerable lack of empathy and sensitivity, usually combined with a strong tendency to use aggression and violence towards others (Z.Kwieciński, B.Śliwerski, 2003). According to J.Bauer:

[...] Children, who have experienced little empathy towards their feelings and understanding them, and have not experienced affection, have not received an image which they can reflect to. [...] they do not have their own neurobiological programs enabling them to experience and show compassion (J.Bauer,2008,p.96).

As research show, lack in the abovementioned fields can be corrected. It is possible to mature to compassion (D.Goleman, 2007). In my view, schools and other educational institutions can and should be places where process of developing feelings will be a top priority. Questions come up at this stage. How to stimulate children's and our own sensitivity towards other people? How to show love to our children, so that they really feel loved?

Having worked with Original Play for several years, I came to the following conclusion: In order for children to feel loved, we need to approach them as individuals and perceive them as individuals. In other words, we need to find a human in them and in ourselves.

As John Paul II said : Upbringing is all about being more human, about being not only having. Thus. through all a person owns can be more human. This means being not only with others but also for others. Upbringing consists in giving and receiving humanity. (John Paul II, 02.04.1980, pp.726-736).

It is about upbringing that is aware of a person's dignity, both in the person who gives and receives education (J.Bagrowicz,2008,p.73). Upbringing based on personal values which are based on absolute categories, gives children an opportunity to learn how to "be" not "have" and perceiving their life with others and for others. (J.Bagrowicz,2008,p.71).

Many educational theories and ideas, in Poland represented in personalist education by priest J.Tarnowski, recognize an individual as the top element in the process of upbringing. (J.Tarnowski,1991 ; Z.Kwieciński,B.Śliwerski,2003,T.I pp.232-246)

A person [...] each individual has their own history of life, and most importantly story of their soul (John Paul II, cited J.Bagrowicz, 2008, p.38).

Each of us deserves respect for their way of development. Upbringing deals with not only forming a person, but also on showing, directing and experiencing a person's dignity.

A person [...] is not just created and individual, nobody has given him dignity through some community in which he lives and develops himself (W.Słomka cited in T.Bielski, 1974,p.83).

As W.Chudy said – you cannot teach anybody dignity. You can only lead a person to such a point in his life, where they will discover a person's dignity themselves (W.Chudy,cited in M.Kalinowski,2005,pp.88-91)

Nobody is able to realize the nature of their neighbor, unless they love him. Thanks to love we are able to see basic features of a loved person, what is more, we realize their potential which is not yet, but should be fulfilled. Moreover, a loving person gives their loved one a chance and power to make this potential real. Making other person aware of who he can and who he should be, his potential becomes realistic. (V.E. Frankl,2009,p.167).

According to priest M.Nowak the top priority in the process of upbringing is making a person take control of their own process of development. In this sense a person is the first and basic upbringing factor, and the teacher plays a role of a partner. (see M.Nowak, *Chrześcijanin w Świecie* 23(1993) 4,p.65).

Person as an individual is the centre of Original Play process. It means that all the participants of the play have a human – human relation. Everybody is the subject of this process. Uniqueness of original play is that adults create appropriate conditions for children to play. It is the child who decides when to participate and how they want to express themselves through play. In other words, an adult involves a child in their action and creates such conditions for the child to get them involved.

Original Play reflects reality as it is. Reveals authentic, intimate feelings of participants. Children have the right and possibility to act according to their personality and experience. During play they express themselves fully and expect adults to do so as well. They expect our authenticity, involvement and openness. Entering a play with children, adults need to leave all the “masks” behind, which they put on in order to deal with the world full of fight and rivalry. They need to give up the idea of being more competent, wiser, more valuable than children. We need to give up all our expectations and free ourselves from constant judging and labeling. Aggression and educational problems need to be seen from the angle of compassion. As A.Kruger said:

[...] parents who are responsible for their child, in the first place need to see that difficulties and problems have their reasons either in the early life of a child or are “stuck” in his body, which have developed when his needs were neglected. (A.Kruger,2009,p.56).

We have the knowledge of children’s psyche and needs, we just need to look at the world from their perspective, to come down to their level. See ourselves through the eyes of a child, listen to ourselves, and than many things will become clear to us and we will be able to show our children more sensitivity (A.Kruger,2009,p.33).

The following points prove that during the process of original play a person is treated as an individual and process of sharing love takes place:

1. acceptance of children as they are at the moment
2. being compassionate, entering the world of feelings, children’s emotions, carefully observing their behavior and appropriately reacting to them ; giving love, especially when a child acts negatively.
3. approaching a child from the perspective of an individual
4. Original Play is a many-sided not one-sided process, which means that we show love to one another
5. authenticity of the encounter
6. the nature of dialogue in Original Play , exchange of emotions, mutual merging of frames of mind, ability to understanding other people’s states and communicating ours.

Original Play’s main aim is to create safe, full of love conditions for development and learning. The feeling, which I experience while playing with children is giving me to them. Children are fully involved in the play, they experience it through their whole bodies. I could say that our worlds become one, all differences disappear. We

become one spirit. As J.W.Dawid put it, when experiencing Original Play, "soul loving" takes place (see J.W.Dawid,1959).

Experiencing love in practice of Original Play is also an essential element of authentic authority. Children are great observers; they copy behaviours and attitudes of their parents. Educational effect of playing together aims at discovering self-realization through love. In order for love to develop correctly in children, they need to observe a pattern of life in love. Especially those children who are aggressive and behave negatively, need a pattern of love better than theirs, they need authority. Such children need time to change. Realizing that no one has the right to act badly even when has been treated badly by others is a gradual process.(V.E.Frankl,2009,p. 143). According to J.Colomb, tutor's mission is to combine two elements: law authority and love authority. Thus, firmness not based on love is insincere. (J.Colomb, W.J.Bagrowicz, 2008,p.121).

Children can recognize their need for love and ability to share with others, only when they experience atmosphere filled with love and respect. (see J.Graczykowska,U.Foks,cited A.Gofron,M.Adamska-Staroń,2009,p.214).

When a human does not experience love, does not touch it and make it his, if he does not find life participation in it, he will become incomprehensible to himself and his life will be pointless (John Paul II,cited I.Gubernat,A.Matusiak,2005,p.35).

Learning through experiencing. Learning through body.

Original Play is based mainly on experiencing. At the end of the play, experience is verbally strengthened. As V.E.Frankl suggested, direct influence of someone's behavior is always more effective than words (V.E.Frankl,2009,p.129).

In Original Play, an adult in close to child's emotions and feelings, becomes a partner, who loves unconditionally and at the same time receives love and emotions children express. A full, loving, emotional and physical participation of adults in the play can be put in one sentence "You need to be with those you bring up". Children who feel accepted unconditionally, discover their value irrespective of what they do. They feel loved just because they live. As my observations show, this message is powerful enough for aggressive children to start making some changes in their attitudes. The ones, who entered to play with me with aggression and anger, were welcomed with open arms, full acceptance, openness and care. After a while they started to discover a whole new perspective, completely new personality, sensitivity and compassion. I have played with many of them for months or even years and observed their development of empathy, sensitivity, compassion and responsibility for others. Not only children can experience such changes through Original Play. I remember

playing with black women in one of the prisons in South Africa. When we have finished playing, one of them said : Now I know how to be with my children and not to hit them, when I come back home.

According to the concept of syncing – our body is the “original” subject of communication. It takes place through signals sent and received by the body.

[...] Messages sent by our bodies - consciously or not - irrespective of being interpreted formally or not, are rarely false, and closer to very often unrealized feelings , than words” (E.T.Hall,2001,pp.63-64).

A person that we see activated our neurobiological processes of reflection. It happens unintentionally, irrespective of our will. Various aspects of behavior such as, visual contact, voice, miming, body language arouse reactions which lead to adapting ourselves (see J.Bauer,2008,p.65). This primal level of communication can be observed among small children from the moment they are born. Children see intentions in their bodies, my body with theirs, and thanks to that my intentions in their bodies (see M.Merleau-Ponty,2001,p.375). You can only become present for somebody through expressing your body. It is a sign of a deeper reality. As R.Le Trocquer said that it is “body translating the language of soul” (R.Le Trocquer 1968,pp.43-44, J.Bagrowicz,2008,p.48).



Pic.1. Klaudia Z aged 10. Original Play

L.Witkowski noticed that schools nowadays deprive children of experiencing life (P.Błajet,2006,p.63). According to E.T.Hall school education overuses verbal messages, which makes other communication and does not develop non-verbal talents. Language and speaking cannot express a feeling fully (E.T.Hall,2001,p.63). The same opinion is expressed by A.Nalaskowki, who says that school education lost

the way to body, and knowledge, education, languages win out with the body. These values are considered to be opposite. (A.Nalaskowski,2002,p.79).

As L.Witkowski continues, we can say that “personal and physical identity are the basis of identity”. It means that, initially unrealized experiences have a considerable influence on constructing identity (L.Witkowski,1989,p.165). Archaic feelings and emotions are reflected in body language. (A.Kruger,2009,p.36). In anthropology body is the foundation of subjective relations (P.Błajet,2006,p.154). Karol Wojtyła perceived a person at various levels. He claimed that:

Separating material goods and the value of a human body from a person as a spiritual being leads to danger of excluding spiritual values from social and economic life (K.Wojtyła.1991,pp.576-578).

Ever since I learned about the concept and practice of Original Play, its main ideas such as play and touch have become a favourite element of my family life and relations with children. Three years ago I was preparing for a trip to Africa, and I wanted to make sure that my children are aware of my love to them. We went for a walk together and I told them about my plans to visit Africa and said to them: “ You have my love always and everywhere”. My six-year-old son replied: “Yes, but we need your touch”.

Touch is the strongest and most natural way of showing love to children. It unintentionally builds ties between people. Without words our love, care and emotional attachment can be shown to children. According to W.Sikorski, touch provides development, builds ties, and soothes stress. However, many parents and teachers touch children only when it is necessary – usually while dealing with difficult or aggressive situations. Many parents do not find time for hugging, many teachers are afraid to touch children.

Original Play gives us an opportunity to become a child through touch, which is a natural part of play. During play with our children we use two languages of love – touch and our attention and devoted time. Touch can always be implemented in our communication with children; we do not need any special conditions for that. All we need is awareness that touch carries our emotions, feelings and intentions. In order for it to be received positively, it needs to be accepted. That is why it is so important to teach children respect for their bodies and its limits. Adults should be aware that you cannot replace bad experiences with touch by talking about it. There is a need for a new kind of experience – one which brings love, security and feeling of belonging.

I cooperate with Pre-Adoption Institution in Częstochowa where I play with infants and small children waiting for adoption. I also share my knowledge on Original Play with institute’s staff. My observations show that infants can differentiate kinds of

touch. They can recognize being touched with love, fear, irritation or aversion. Many researchers came to a conclusion, that children who are touched with love, develop better, are emotionally stable than the ones who did not experience this kind of touch. If these basic children's needs such as relation with their mother and their own reflection in – as someone once said – “the light of mother's eyes”, won't be fulfilled, children's development is easily damaged (A.Kruger,2009,p.51). According to J.Bauer, whenever we try to look after our children “rationally” without any sign of love or affection, will bring tragic results. Such behaviour will destroy the ability to create emotional relations with other people and the sense of belonging to them. (see J.Bauer,2008,p.48).

In a way, we can say that our life depends on touch. At the beginning of 20th century, American orphanages have experienced deaths of new born babies and infants who were fed and looked after correctly. This situation was linked to lack of touch, which would have given the children a sign of being loved. H.Harlow's research proved the thesis, that soothing, safe and loving touch is more important for children than their mother's feeding. The research show that child's own mother is not the only person who can give appropriate care (see W.Sikorski in “Charaktery” August 2006,p.23). The results of the research give pre adoptive parents hope to create right environment for development, even without the biological bond.

Conclusion

If we want our children to feel loved, develop correctly, learn easily and with pleasure, we must find time for real relation and meeting with our children, for play and building bonds. We need to look at education from a different perspective, as a process of sharing, giving and receiving love, as a process of personal development where love and other people are the most important elements. It is crucial for teachers and tutors to be more sensitive to other people. They need to learn to see love which flows from children, and give their own to them and remember that the most important moment in upbringing is the mutual relation free from adults' domination over children.

Educational practice should promote favourable situations and conditions for building mutual “upbringing in love and to love”, which will support feeling and exploring other person's experiences and checking to what extent, the signals we send to others are reciprocated.

Original Play used in education is based on our inner value which is goodness. Accepting these ideas can be the basis for improvement of social relations (eliminating aggression, punishment and revenge) and change of world and people (A.Gofron, M.Adamska-Staroń,2009,p.10).

“Original Play” fulfills their most basic psychological needs naturally, creates perfect conditions for correct emotional development and improvement of social skills. It

helps to integrate the body and the mind. It is essential to build a bridge between the intellectual world of adults and the spontaneous, innocent world of children and youth. The reasons for teacher-pupil conflicts can be partly found in the tension between the two worlds (A.Nalaskowski,2000,p.50). Adults' world is mainly verbal, children want to be seen as a whole. That is why it would be beneficial for all the participants of the learning process, if school respected not only pupils' verbal communication but also the ones shown through body language, and even silence.

