

FOREWORD

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“Human sense is understanding how to live in the human and physical worlds that children normally develop in the first few years of life. It is learned spontaneously in direct encounters with these worlds that arise unavoidably everywhere, transcending cultural differences. The learning is always informed and guided by emotion – that is, by feelings of significance, of value, of what matters. And it is highly stable and enduring, once established. It is the foundation on which all that follows must build”

(Margaret Donaldson, personal communication. See her book, *Children’s Minds*, 1978, on the motives of human sense and school learning)

Supporting the natural spirit of the child, and its growth in companionship

In every human community, whatever its culture, from the most “communal” to the most “private”, from the smallest and least technical to the global and most advanced in artificial ways of collaborative life, parents and grandparents delight in the vitality and creativity of their children. They value how a young human being brings a love of affectionate company and enjoyment of adventurous play. The youngest of infants do not only sleep, or make strident calls for care and comfort of the body. They act with purposeful co-ordination of their organs of movement and sensation, showing interest and affective judgement. In intimate encounters, they smile and imitate many expressions with emotions of interest and enjoyment (Kugiumutzakis & Trevarthen, 2014), and they soon take active part in the composition of imaginative conversations, action games, and songs (Trevarthen, 1986, 2006; Trevarthen & Delafield-Butt, 2013). The rhythmic stories of baby songs have the same timings as action games involving shared movements of the hands and body. They can be dance or song, and often are both together (Eckerdal & Merker, 2009). In the Kalahari desert, Takada (2005) has studied how mothers of the Xun people exercise the playful young bodies of their infants aged about six months, when they can just stand, by bouncing them in “baby gymnastics”, which prepares them for later dancing with other children. We learn essential values of life from accepting and accompanying this innate human spirit of moving and its conviviality, and feel we must protect it from harm and help when it is distressed.

We need also to recognise that the active process of growth and learning has a programme not only for the immediate or proximal future, but for more distant times that make up steps of a lifetime. Age-related stages mark development of the body with development of the brain, and the changes affect the motives to regulate the functions of the body, to engage with and perceive the world, and to relate to people,

including parents, siblings, and teachers or therapists (Trevarthen & Aitken, 2003). The young person—infant, toddler, school child, adolescent, or adult—is changing in impulses to share meanings and feelings of life in a community.

This book brings the expertise of four child psychotherapists together for a wide-ranging and penetrating discussion of the factors that affect early development of relationships and understanding in actual therapeutic encounters which they examined together by micro-analysis of videos recording their work. They use different sciences and different metaphors to characterise their methods of therapy with children and their parents and family, but all use videos to teach their method of working with children, and all recognise the importance of the subtle micro-moments of change in the present, and the shared “composition” of narratives of feeling and recollecting. Peter Levine is an expert on motor defence mechanisms of the body and regulation of bodily feelings of safety and risk by the autonomic system. Jukka Mäkelä applies the performance of Theraplay engagements with the child to establish trust in risk-taking games and active, rhythmic story-making. Haldor Øvreeide uses developmentally supportive dialogue and self-organising in relationships in the “lived moment”. Eia Asen, working in London, employs “multi-family therapy” and “mentalization-based family therapy” to support shared rational examination of anxieties and emotional factors that limit awareness and imagination.

Together, under the supportive guidance of Marianne Bentzen and Susan Hart, these four presented and discussed their work in a two-day conference in Copenhagen on “The quest for the non-specific factors in psychotherapy with children”, which was transcribed, leading to a book in Danish of which this volume is the English translation.

While they bring different interests and knowledge to bear on their work, and to interpret the recordings, all agreed that support for healthy development, or encouragement of recovery of it after severe distress or neglect, needs to engage with the child’s own experience, in the present, in ways that must seek to release the latent force for growth in self-confidence and satisfaction. All considered their work to be in alliance with parents and others who share the child’s life. The child therapist is a guide and companion for all these, not an expert instructing them.

Sometimes, children are sad and withdrawn, or angry and defiant. Their anticipation of taking pleasure by being alive with trusted companions in a kind and joyful world is too strong. It can sense betrayal and will fight against misfortune, as well as cry out in pain. Maltreatment or neglect corrupts the plan for development of skills for relating (Perry, 2002; Trevarthen, Aitken, Vandekerckhove, et al., 2006). To help, we have to find ways that will “follow the child” in order to restore the natural creative optimism and sense of fun. To do that effectively, a parent, teacher, or therapist has to recall and

appreciate, not just the fragility and dependence of childhood, but especially its will to find both security in the body and joy by living with communal invention—to be well and to play with ways of moving that others will want to share, for fun. The latest science of human “mirroring” of actions and awareness for self and with others is seeking to recover this understanding of the integrated self and its time-regulated purposes, and ways in which the acting human person relates with others (Ammaniti & Gallese, 2014; Goodrich, 2006). Correlations of prefrontal cortex activity with processes of rational representation and explanation need to be put in affective context. As Haldor Øvreeide says, “If we as therapists cannot use words in a way that links experiences with symbols, we will have words that are not words; they are dead words. And we have societies that are full of dead words. A word without emotion is not a word. It does not connect.”

Seeking to find secure common ground for their adventurous work in neuroaffective developmental psychology, the authors accepted the model of Paul MacLean’s triune brain to describe the three levels of function of the deep autonomic nervous system, the intermediate limbic system, and the superior prefrontal “mentalizing” system. Conceiving these as a hierarchy of “compasses” that might guide impulses and feelings of expressive behaviour, they further devised a map of the territory to be explored for each system with orthogonal co-ordinates, or axes, of “arousal regulation” (active or sympathetic and passive or parasympathetic) and “hedonic tone” (pleasure vs. displeasure) for the autonomic compass, of positive and negative emotional valence across “altercentric participation” vs. “egocentric participation” for the limbic compass, and high and low “reflective functioning” with activation or inhibition of “impulse” to take action for the prefrontal compass of “volitional regulation”. Each compass has four quadrants in which interactions of the self with any other, including the therapist, are acted out.

These mappings culminated in a triangulation that allowed four contributors to the discussion of their methods to summarise the communications regulated between the child, a parent, and the therapist, in which the therapist aims to optimise the relationship between the child and the parent. In conclusion, special emphasis was placed on the importance of considering the child’s capacity, with its family, to live in the community and to make good relationships there.

I am a biologist who has spent most of my academic life as a researcher and teacher of early child development, using descriptive methods with the aid of micro-analysis of film, video, and audio recordings. I have also long been interested in the advancing knowledge of the creative development of the brain and its function in guiding the agency, awareness, and well-being of the body. How movements of intended action and of self-regulation become messages for other human minds is a core preoccupation. I have no experience of child therapy, but the practical message of this

book convinces me that the neuroaffective approach to the support and guidance of a child's capacities and opportunities for development gives precious information about how brain and body serve the young mind and regulate how it shares meaning with other minds. The findings and detailed evidence from case studies of "magic and transformation", so carefully presented and interpreted, will be of great value, not only for child therapists and those whom they train, but for all teachers and students of developmental psychology as well. It has important information for neurophysiology and both affective and cognitive neuroscience, too.

