



Daniel J. Siegel

Dan Siegel is one of the innovators who synthesized the science of the brain, attachment relationships, and the emergent mind into the theoretical framework of Interpersonal Neurobiology. Having amplified the understandings originally published in his seminal book *The Developing Mind* (1999), through volumes including *The Mindful Brain* (2007), *Mindsight* (2010), and *The Mindful Therapist* (2010), Dan is now dedicated to bringing the message of mindsight and integration as the cornerstone of mental health to people in many fields—psychotherapy, parenting, education, organizational development and others.

The GAINS Anniversary Interviews: Daniel J. Siegel

Interviewed by Debra Pearce-McCall

Debra: Dan, on this occasion of the fifth anniversary of the Global Association for Interpersonal Neurobiology Studies, we thought it would be delightful to get your perspective on what you've seen happen in this field over the last five years, and what you may hope or predict might be happening in the next five years. So, let's start with looking backwards.

Dan: Well, first of all, thanks for taking the time to have a conversation about this, and happy birthday to GAINS, and to all of you who made GAINS the fantastic organization that it is. It's really an honor to be on the Board and to really watch the organization grow. I think the newsletters are just fabulous pieces of art and integrative work that really connect us all to each other. I know it takes a lot of hard, devoted work and time and love really, so it's just a beautiful thing to behold.

So in the last five years—and you know this, Debra, because you've been part of it—we've had the gathering of people together initially for the immersion courses where we had those wild weekend times of having people read certain of the interpersonal neurobiology texts, and then teach them back to each other, including me. It was a kind of intense and emotionally arousing experience that I think was used to inspire people to realize that this has got to be a movement that goes from the ground up. A grassroots movement.

At the first meeting, people said let's start this gathering and GAINS was a nice name because it was an acronym—Global Association for Interpersonal Neurobiology Studies. We got the mindgains.org website, and off it went. I think it was important that there be an organization that was non-profit, that was independent of the Norton group that was publishing the books in the field, or from any

of the founders of the field, me or Allan Schore or Lou Cozolino, or any of the authors in the series, so it could be an entity that stood on its own. I think the initial group from our first immersion included Bonnie Badenoch, Lauren Culp, Carol Landsberg and others, all involved in getting it on the road. Debra, you and Kirke Olson were also active from the beginning. Joan Rosenberg and Judy Miller were also part of this group, I think. I know there were others.

Debra: I think that covers the founding members and those who started the working board or joined it early on; most of those folks are still on the GAINS board. Our current board also includes Sue Marriott, Orli Peter, and Patty Olwell. Richard Hill, from Australia, will be joining us now, too, as well as Lynda Klau and Ward Davis.

Dan: That's fantastic. So, all of you people were getting together, starting with those of you at the immersions in 2005 and 2006, and realizing this could become something that had a life of its own. As the saying always goes, it takes just a few people to make a change. So GAINS' creation and growth—that's really exciting.

And in the course of the last five years, interpersonal neurobiology, I think, has established itself more and more in different fields. Certainly in the field of therapy, where it began, but also in the field of education. And Debra, through the work you're doing, in organizational functioning. One of our graduates of that immersion program, Curt Thompson, wrote a book on interpersonal neurobiology as it relates to the New Testament. So now it's in the field of religion, along with taking a role in mindfulness and contemplation as well. I think there's a really fantastic way where we're starting to make inroads into these disparate fields—mindfulness and contemplation, organizational

functioning, education, psychotherapy, and parenting—five major areas where these ideas are getting established, so that's the first part that's so exciting.

Debra: As interpersonal neurobiology is moving out into all these different application arenas, you've had lots and lots of experience now, talking with folks about this. How do you answer the question: what makes interpersonal neurobiology a unique framework, and how this is different than just taking the findings of affective or social cognitive neuroscience and applying that in therapy or education or leadership?

Dan: Right. That's the really important question to ask. There are a couple of things. The first is that although the name interpersonal neurobiology has neurobiology in it, we are not a division of neurobiology. The reason I came up with that phrase, interpersonal neurobiology, was to embrace the breadth that this approach could take. I didn't know there was a term called *consilience*, but now that E.O. Wilson has made that idea clear, we can embrace that term, too. Consilience is the idea of finding independent perspectives from these disciplines that often don't speak with each other, and finding the universal principles that they share, so that they can be taken and woven together into a single fabric. Like the story of the old blind men and the elephant, where the different experiences weave together to see the whole elephant view. So the first thing to say is that interpersonal neurobiology is a way of knowing that is consilient, that embraces not just all the different disciplines of science, but also the arts, the contemplative practices, religion, literature. We want to really look at any pursuit of truth that can then help us understand what it means to be human. In that way, as far as I can tell, we are one of the

only—if not the only—discipline that has consilience at its core. So that's pretty unusual, but it also makes us not necessarily received by any individual discipline that may be studying the foot of the elephant or the trunk or the tail. They may not welcome us in because we offer something that "goes beyond the data," because we're actually taking data from different disciplines and then creating a larger picture.

Now we need to be very humble about that because staying close to the data is very important, so that we know what has been established and what hasn't been established. I think the real challenge of interpersonal neurobiology is to be really respectful of the different ways of knowing, have the courage to move our understanding forward beyond the data, but also know when we're doing that, and being willing to go back and re-address our



conclusions at any point.

This summer, I have 15 interns working with me to examine *The Developing Mind*. We went through every sentence of that book, and we got 1700 new scientific references to either support or refute the basic principles of IPNB. It was an amazing experience to actually give them the assignment: please try to prove this framework in this book is wrong. That was their task. During the course of the summer, that's what they did, and then we had this week

where we projected the book up on the wall, and went through every line of it. The exciting thing was that 99% of that book was affirmed by new technological advances that could either support what was said, or see whether the hypotheses that were made had any kind of data refuting them or supporting them. I can now say, with even more enthusiasm, after having reviewed the literature from the last 12 years, that the principles, because they're based in consilience, have stood the test of time, at least these dozen years; that the hypotheses that IPNB made have been useful at predicting outcomes of studies that hadn't yet been done.

The whole premise that makes IPNB unique and different from, let's say, what's taught in any division of neuroscience as you've mentioned, or anything else, is how we talk about the mind. We actually have a working definition of the mind. No other field has that. We show how the mind is intimately connected to the body and relationships, which no other field does. We actually look at this mind-brain-relationship triangle as being composed of three facets of energy and information flow—relationships being the sharing, the brain being the extended nervous system that is the mechanism, and the mind being the regulatory, emergent property that arises from the complex system of the nervous system and relationships.

We take these steps that no other field does actually, and then we take it one step further and we do another wacky thing, which is we say that a healthy mind-brain-relationship system comes from integration. Some people use the word *integration* to mean, "I'm going to link cognitive therapy with emotion therapy and it's an integrated therapy." Actually, we don't use the word integration like that, or like "I'm doing integrative health" when they say, "I'm combining yoga with herbs, so I'm an integrative doctor." That's not what we mean by integration. By integration, as you know, we mean the linkage of differentiated parts, and so by looking deeply at the mathematics of integration and the idea of linking differentiated parts, we see that harmony arises.

And chaos and rigidity emerge when we don't have integration. So all that being said, the domains of integration then become an organizing principle through which we can totally re-interpret the *DSM*. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* is an example of chaos, rigidity, or both.

In many ways, even though we've been talking like this for over 15 years in the field of IPNB, in many ways we're at what some call a revolution now in the field of mental health. To take some new and exciting findings, for example, out of the University of Washington at St. Louis, research by Marcus Raichle shows that the default mode, what the brain's activity is doing when not given a task, is actually revealing states of integration when there's health, and impaired integration when there's unhealth, like in autism or schizophrenia. Although those are very controversial studies—the default mode and the meaning of it—it's supportive, not proving, but it's supportive of our stance that integration is health. If you look at the work of Martin Teicher [of Harvard Medical School] that shows that abuse and neglect leads to the damage of integrative fibers in the brain, that's supportive. Not proof, but supportive. There's been more and more and more data that can be interpreted through an IPNB lens to say that integration is health.

Debra: So as these ideas continue to grow, and all the seeds that have been planted over the last five years sprout and start blooming, what are you imagining could happen over these next five years?

Dan: Wow. There's of course the question of what could happen and there's what I hope happens, and there's also what I think will happen [laughter]. There are so many dimensions of that. I guess the "could" is in the range of what I hope will happen and what might happen. Predicting what will happen? That's an easier one. I have no idea [laughter]. I don't know.

Debra: And with that prediction you're absolutely sure of being correct.

Dan: There you go. That's right. So what I hope happens, which I think is in the realm of the "could," is something like this. I think there's a moment in cultural evolution where people, on a grassroots level, can be empowered to learn how to focus their minds in a way that strengthens how the mind works, integrates the brain, and creates kinder relationships, both with other people and also with themselves. So how would that become a grassroots effort? I think it needs to begin in school and I think it needs to begin in families, and it can't be something where some expert is saying do this or do that. It's got to be something that becomes as natural as brushing your teeth, where people are empowered to get a toothbrush, to brush their teeth every day, and to maintain the health of their teeth.

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Now I'm not saying that the mind-brain-relationships are dirty, like teeth get dirty, but I am saying that a regular, integrative practice of being kind to yourself and being kind to others, is going to promote a stronger mind, a healthier brain, a way in which our relationships are more empathic. And I think we can do that. So now how do you do it? Well, you know, in this book *The Whole-Brain Child*, what Tina [Bryson] and I did was to translate the work in the *Mindsight* book, which is all about the domains of integration, into accessible examples for parents to use so that they can actually promote integration in their children. So we hope that *The Whole-Brain Child* will be a step in making it a grassroots movement for parents to create these integrative mind-brain-relationship experiences for their children. You know, I'm going to work on a book for teachers, to try to translate IPNB for teachers. I know other people are doing that as well. So whatever we can do to get it into the classroom. There are different programs that I'm working with, in

various parts of the country, to make IPNB and the Mindsight approach—seeing the mind-brain-relationship as fundamentally three facets of one thing—available in schools. If we can do that, I think we can empower people to do this from a grassroots effort. This stuff is so accessible. It's just like tooth brushing. It isn't like a high-tech thing. It's just a matter of getting it into people's lives.

Psychotherapy? If there was a way of bringing mindsight into psychotherapy...I think it would be something on the order of people realizing that while the *DSM-III* and *DSM-IV* have been useful, that we need to take the bold step of saying not just what pathology is, but what health is. We need to take the bold step of defining the mind and mental health. I've interviewed almost 98,000 mental health practitioners around the planet and again, 2-5% only have had a lecture on

the mind, meaning that over 95% have never had a lecture on the mind or mental health. This has got to be a natural part of the evolution, if not a revolution, in our field where we stop being *mindless*. Not only can we actually have a working definition of the mind, but when we define the mind as "an embodied and relational process that regulates energy and information flow," then we're in a position to teach regulation, to teach how to monitor and modify with more clarity and more stability and strength. So we can actually define the mind and teach what a healthy mind is. When we put integration into that mix, then we can re-interpret the entire *DSM*, give people an understanding of where they might look and possibly make research more effective, but also interventions more specific. Psychotherapy then becomes an integrative process, literally SNAGging the brain, stimulating normal activation and growth towards integration.

So in all these ways, in the next five years, whether it's in families, in schools, in psychotherapy, certainly in organizations, like your article that you wrote with me, we want to promote integration, in the group level in organizational functioning. And hopefully the community can carry forward these ideas so that when you come across someone in the street, you realize that person is actually a part of you, that your sense of self is not limited to just your body. That you realize that "self" extends beyond your body to other beings, to other people, other living beings on this planet. And even extends beyond the time that we're alive, that we realize that we're all interconnected in this way. So I think by staying true to IPNB as a consilient science, consistent yet open to other fields like contemplation and the arts, it's an opportunity for all of us to work together. It's really a group effort to bring this kind of transformation of our awareness into the world globally. Then, as we do that, to see changes. In the online course that the Mindsight Institute offers, we have people on six continents who are regularly

forming Mindsight communities around these issues. We'll even be having our first Annual IPNB conference at UCLA in March of this year! There is an opportunity to join together as a grassroots effort to transform the field of mental health and education, and to help awaken people's minds. And I think GAINS serves a really important role in bringing that global presence of IPNB. I'm just very optimistic about what the future holds, and I think with all the hard work that everyone at GAINS is doing, I'm very hopeful that we can empower people to bring integration and health into their lives.

Debra: Thank you very much, Dan, for sharing the celebration of the fifth anniversary with GAINS and with all the folks who indeed join you in this hope for what *can* happen in the next five years, that really could be the beginning of an even healthier future for many, many people on this planet.

Dan: Absolutely. Happy birthday.



The majority of us lead quiet, unheralded lives as we pass through this world. There will most likely be no ticker-tape parades for us, no monuments created in our honor.

But that does not lessen our possible impact, for there are scores of people waiting for someone just like us to come along; people who will appreciate our compassion, our unique talents. Someone who will live a happier life merely because we took the time to share what we had to give.

Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have a potential to turn a life around. It's overwhelming to consider the continuous opportunities there are to make our love felt.

-Leo Buscaglia