

THE STORY OF HOW GAINS CAME TO BE

Editor's note

The Global Association for Interpersonal Neurobiology Studies (GAINS), like all organisations, has a history of origin. GAINS was made possible by a small group of enthusiastic and committed people, and they are the best ones to tell the story. I asked some of the people who were involved in the birth of GAINS—Debra Pearce McCall, Kirke Olson and Lauren Culp—to reflect on their memories of how GAINS came to be and what it felt like for them.

Debra: Back in 2005, Daniel Siegel, one of the pioneers of the field of interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB), decided to gather a group of folks who were deeply interested in this, and who also had years of teaching and training experience. After applications were accepted for this special weekend, our tasks were revealed: to take on chapters of Dan's wise and widely influential (and simply wide) book, *The Developing Mind* (Guilford Press, 2nd ed., 2012), in pairs, and prepare a 20-minute teaching for the group—no slides allowed.

Lauren: Several in the small gathering had attended Dan's Los Angeles seminar groups for some time, and others had also studied with Allan Schore, another pioneer in IPNB, whose book, *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self: The Neurobiology of Emotional Development* (Lawrence Erlbaum, 1994), is also foundational in showing the relational nature of our "individuality".

Kirke: I had heard Dan Siegel introduce his book on an early 2000s version of a webinar—100+ people on the telephone at the

same time! I was instantly hooked because it gave me understandable neurological explanations of what I have been seeing for years in K-12 schools. I was honored to be one of the small number of folks from all over the United States who were asked to attend that first weekend gathering, and enthusiastically agreed to the cross-country trip. About two weeks before my trip I was surprised to receive an assignment to present half of the book's introduction to Dan and (in my limbic-ly aroused brain) a group of highly trained neuroscience experts. I still remember my nervousness as I began my talk as well as Dan's high five when I finished. And I deeply learned what I shared that day!

Debra: When I was introduced to IPNB, I felt a thrill I hadn't felt since "grokking system theory" in the seventies—as happens for many folks, it brings together so many threads of knowledge and understanding in a coherent and valid framework. That room was resonating with curiosity and content! You all made the "attachment party" exercise my partner and I developed totally fun learning.

And our desire to do a great job only increased when Louis Cozolino, the third IPNB pioneer, showed up to listen to us all. (An aside about Lou: his first book, *The Neuroscience of Psychotherapy* (W. W. Norton, 1st ed., 2002), is one of the best explanations of what makes any model, intervention or technique more likely to be healing.)

Lauren: I became interested in the work of Dan and Allan through my prenatal and perinatal work. I was very active in the Pre and Perinatal Psychology and Health Association, and conveniently, my office was on the same floor as Dan's (in Brentwood, CA). I had been attending his monthly advanced seminars and was also presenting on that weekend. After each pair finished, we got feedback on the content and the IPNB qualities of our teaching. This intensity translated into deep learning and the beginning of some lifelong connections.

Kirke: I also fondly remember the Chinese dinner that followed and the discussion among the enthusiastic small group. Over Hot and Sour Soup and Moo Goo Gai Pan, a nameless, formless group began to emerge with the purpose to make it possible for people to learn, apply and share IPNB across the globe.

Debra: Food was definitely involved! The work of neuroscientist and GAINS advisory board member, Steven Porges, tells us that being able to share food together in safety and connection is a vagal accomplishment. (I remember the Italian food we all enjoyed together the other night as well.) By the end of that weekend, a core group committed to

starting something. Some folks who worked with Lauren and really helped GAINS begin are no longer on the working board—especially Bonnie Badenoch (now on the GAINS advisory board) and Carol Landsberg.

Lauren: Bonnie, Carol and I attended Dan's monthly seminars. At first, the small GAINS working board meetings were held in Dan's office suite in the afternoon; as we grew over the years, our working board grew international and our meetings transitioned to virtual. And we were so fortunate to get enthusiastic "yes" responses from those pivotal theorists, researchers and writers we asked to be on our advisory board—including Dan, Allan and Lou. The name GAINS arose during a brainstorming session with Dan, and when we later discovered that the domain was already taken, I suggested the domain name "mindGAINS". To give you a sense of the early meeting environment, suggesting an idea was usually also a verbal commitment to follow through with the implementation to completion. With no prior experience, I was designated to create the first website. We also started a directory, so IPNB-informed professionals could be found by each other and the public.

Kirke: As the far-away East Coast member, I discussed and observed rather than participated in the numerous meetings with lawyers and accountants involved in creating the nonprofit GAINS out of our enthusiasm. We've had wonderful board of director members who helped with all different parts of our growth over the years, and we will always be grateful to all those folks who put in volunteer service

time for GAINS. Within a short time we also developed an amazing advisory board, including Dan, Allan and Lou, of course—and for all too short a time, the wonderful poet and philosopher, John O’Donohue.

Debra: Yes, blessings and gratitude to John, and to our other advisory board member we will always hold in honored memory, Jaak Panksepp, who was a ground-breaking affective neuroscientist. Our advisory board and board of directors have always been various sorts, which makes sense since from the beginning we wanted a community that was not-for-profit, global, and open to anyone interested in IPNB, where each member is applying IPNB professionally—as a therapist, educator, coach, leader, physician, bodyworker, attorney, or more; and personally, as a parent, a partner, a human!

Lauren: In just a couple of years, interest in GAINS grew and our advisory board expanded, with Stephen Porges—creator of polyvagal theory—joining, as well as some internationally known clinicians whose work incorporates principles from IPNB, such as Pat Ogden and Diana Fosha. GAINS is so grateful for all our fabulous advisory board members and their ongoing support and contributions. In addition to those named already, they include the renowned mirror neuron researcher, Marco Iacoboni; medical leadership expert and heart surgeon, Ross M. Ungerleider; bestselling author and poet, Diane Ackerman; leader and physician, Eugene Beresin; neuroscience researcher and innovator, Carl D. Marci; spiritual scholar, James Finley; child/parent advocate, Patty Wipfler, and author and speaker,

Iain McGilchrist.

Debra: In the first decade, we really focused on creating our advisory board, all the core structure and policy needed for a sustainable nonprofit, and our core membership and board. Our main projects were a web presence, and creating a community for people to communicate about IPNB. Once the annual IPNB Conference was so named, we did all we could as board members to attend, providing an opportunity to bond with each other, connect with other board members, and invite others to become part of GAINS; and, of course, immerse in some of the latest IPNB related thinking! Join us there!

Lauren: Back then, the best way to communicate with each other and grow our community was to create an original publication. Started by Bonnie Badenoch and Carol Landsberg as editors, who were soon joined by Debra Pearce-McCall, and with the goal of integrating right- and left-hemispheric modes of understanding, the journal—initially called *The GAINS Quarterly*—evolved to a compilation of various types of articles, photos, art, and a licensed cartoon. I served as a fact-checker, keeping up with the latest information coming from Dan’s monthly seminars and helping find interested authors.

Kirke: In addition to building community, we have always created a platform for those who were willing to try their hand at writing or teaching or sharing about applying, theorizing, or researching IPNB. I am forever grateful to GAINS, especially Bonnie Badenoch and Debra Pearce-McCall, for their early

edits of my Department of Education columns, and later for Bonnie's help with writing *The Invisible Classroom: Relationships, Neuroscience and Mindfulness in School* (W. W. Norton, 2014), a book that would not have been published without GAINS.

Lauren: For years, the talented team of Bonnie and Debra passionately inspired and supported writers to pursue articles as they spent countless hours collecting, writing, and editing the GAINS publication. Creativity was flowing in the world of IPNB, and whatever talents we as individuals and professionals brought to the board were utilized. As an artist, I drew cartoons that were relevant. (Only one was rejected due to its PG content. Hint: mirror neurons theme using famous film dialogue of Mae West.) Our advisory board members contributed through articles and wonderful interviews.

Debra: A number of the article authors have gone on to author excellent books—several in the Norton IPNB Series like yours, Kirke. We like to think that's in part due to the IPNB-informed way we did the editing process, as a co-creating back-and-forth. It was a lot of hard work! After years, we stopped producing the journal. Since then, I've edited three very special e-books for GAINS. All these publications are archived at mindGAINS.org and available to members. We have original articles from IPNB scholars; articles explaining core principles and new research; examples of applications to all kinds of therapy, education, leadership, spirituality, healthcare, and parenting; visual and written art, and much more. We also continue to have a forum for

anyone interested in sharing their IPNB expertise in writing, through our blog.

Lauren: And we are definitely international and interdisciplinary! We have had board members from several countries and various professions, and our membership is growing around the world. Our current Board of Directors, in addition to the three of us, includes Richard Hill from Australia; Lynn Redenbach and Mandy Shewfelt from Canada; Lynda Klau and Greg Czyszczon from the U.S. East Coast, and Mary Meador from the West.

Kirke: The past few years, we've worked diligently to keep up with the current forms of communicating and creating community. We have a very active Facebook page and Twitter feed. And we have changed our publication to the *Living Journal*—an ongoing series of webinars featuring conversations with people whose work is highly relevant to IPNB. We share the original broadcast with the world, and the videos are then available on our site for our members whenever they want. We've also started a virtual IPNB book club: the first one featured Dan's book, *Mind* (Mind Your Brain Inc., 2017)—and had a special guest too! Look for the second one in 2019.

Debra: One of the best parts of this organization is how we hope to consistently apply IPNB in how we “do” GAINS and how we are with each other. We use IPNB to organize our meetings, inform our strategic planning, design our continued improvements, plan our webinars, and more. The absolute *best* part is the people.