



PATRICK TOMLINSON ASSOCIATES

**WHY INTEGRATION AND CONNECTION ARE SO IMPORTANT IN WELL-BEING AND
THE HEALING OF TRAUMA
PATRICK TOMLINSON (2018)**

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Integration has been central to my work for over 30 years. That is as a practitioner working with traumatized children and young people, as a leader and manager, as a consultant and as a writer. I think integration is vitally important, whether thinking about the developing individual, family, community, or societal systems. It is also essential in a well-run organization. Most of what is included in this series on Integration was written in four blogs during 2015.

The Need for Integration: **1.** Integration and Connection in Well-Being and Recovery from Trauma; **2.** Leadership and Management; **3.** Integrating and Connecting – The Essence of Trauma Recovery Environments; **4.** Why we all Need an Integration Agenda

Since 2015 I have had the benefit of returning to a leadership position. This experience has hugely reaffirmed the importance of integration. So, I have reorganized the material and added some. I have also been inspired by the way integration is emerging so strongly as a concept in the present. This is happening on both a micro and macro level. For example, in understanding the needs of the individual and the organization.

As well as my thoughts on this subject, there are numerous references and links to videos and articles. There is plenty more to consider. A future blog may focus on the major challenges and resistances to Integration – what makes it so difficult?

Here are a few excerpts from the blogs that highlight the meaning and importance of Integration and Connection.

Child Development and Attachment

Child development is centred on the integration of emotional and physical aspects of relating. For this to be achieved the primary caregiver must be reasonably integrated as a person, but also connected within a wider environment. Ideally, there are positive connections with a partner, family, and community. These connections provide the holding environment within which the caregiver and infant connect physically and emotionally.

During infancy, the attunement and emotional regulation of the caregiver is central to the developmental process. Mirror neurons in the caregiver and infant connect with the detail of each other's feelings and behaviour. The infant's neurons fire, connect and become wired. This kind of connected being 'in tune' with the other is called attunement. (Stien and Kendall, 2004)

Moreover, it has received influential support in the last two decades from neurobiological research. This has found that secure attachments produce a growth-facilitating environment that builds neuronal connections and integrates brain systems.

Secure attachment promotes neuronal connections, helping to strengthen and integrate key brain structures. (Stien and Kendall, 2004, p.8).

Connection

What enables an infant's mind, body and brain to develop is the connection with others. Throughout our lives, development takes place within a relational context. As Bessel van der Kolk (2014, p.110) says,

Most of our energy is devoted to connecting with others.....We are profoundly social creatures; our lives consist of finding our place within the community of human beings.

It could be said that human connection is the glue that enables integration to take place. Different parts become integrated through connection. For example, a person with an integrated sense of their identity can connect the different parts of their life. Having an integrated and coherent autobiographical narrative is an important indicator of mental health. Such a narrative is one where the parts are connected. Like a story with a beginning, middle and end, the different parts are joined together coherently.

Networks of connections provide a potentially stronger level of support and emotional containment. This powerful network is then internalized and integrated by the child as part of his internal model. A good support network is the single strongest protection against becoming traumatized (van der Kolk, 2014, p.210). The architecture of the brain comes to represent the architecture of the social environment.

Integration

A healthy person is an integrated person. If we think of the developing brain, we can think of neurons connecting and forming integrated neural pathways. We can think of different parts of the brain, connecting and functioning together in an integrated way. We can think of mind-body integration. Integration of our senses with our mind and conscious awareness. Integration with the world around us. From the beginning of life, integration is interwoven with attachment.

If we can connect our own ongoing need for integration to the tasks we are involved with, there is more potential for growth than through anything else we could put on the agenda. We only need to think about the many ways in which better integration might benefit our own life and work. If we are working on integration, development and achievement are likely outcomes.

Separation and differentiation are central to the process of becoming integrated. Healthy relationships are connected and separate at the same time. Siegel (2012) sums up the importance of this very well,

...a summary of the entire field of attachment in one sentence, secure attachment is based on integrative communication, honoring differences promoting linkages.

Well-Being

Before connections can be achieved, safety must be established. Only when the disconnected or unconnected person begins to feel safe will he be able to take the risks involved in connecting. Once the process of connecting begins the person is moving towards integration. The foundations of well-being can be safety, connection, and integration.

Trauma

Among many negative impacts on the brain-body system, trauma interferes with the integration of left and right hemisphere brain functioning. Rational thought cannot be accessed in the face of overwhelming emotion. Emotional and social disconnection can begin a spiral that leads to further isolation and alienation. On the other hand, emotional and relational connection creates a positive spiral. It leads to the conditions that bring about more connection.

Recovery

If neural integration is as Dan Siegel (2006) says, 'at the heart of well-being' and trauma disrupts healthy development, then recovery is about completing the process of integration. A person or any living system that is integrated is one where the different parts work together functionally. For individuals, there is mind-body and sensory integration and an effective balance where emotion and reason complement each other. The same analogy can be applied to social groups, such as families, teams, communities, and societies.

In the healing of trauma, just as in ordinary development 'it takes a village to raise a child'. Or as Perry and Szalavitz (2006, p.231) said, "What maltreated and traumatized children most need is a healthy community to buffer the pain, distress and loss caused by their earlier trauma. What works to heal them is anything that increases the number and quality of a child's relationships".

Recovery aims to create connections that can be personally integrated. Connections can be thought of concerning oneself, between internal and external worlds, in relationships with others, and the wider community. The level of connection that traumatized children need means that those who are involved in the therapeutic work must be highly attuned. Emotional attunement is receptive to connection and creates secure attachment.

Recovery from injuries perpetrated in a social context must occur in a social context. These centres, responsible for healing, must become therapeutic communities where recovering is more important than control, and compassion and empathy drive out fear and coercion. (Farragher and Yanosy, 2005, p.100)

Therapeutic Models

Strong models are ones where everyone whatever their role is involved in the process of integration and connection. For example, a therapist or carer might be doing what Dan Siegel recommends – working to improve the integrative functioning of a child's prefrontal

neocortex. While the task of the organization leader might be about building integrative connections inside and outside of the organization.

Einstein's view that 'example isn't another way to teach it is the only way to teach', provides a good principle for how we approach the task. If integration is the aim of trauma recovery, then we must practice integration in every aspect of our work.

Organizations and Communities

All relationships and roles in the community were considered part of the healing environment. The role of the maintenance staff and domestic assistants were considered equally alongside the work of teachers, care workers, and therapists. This is one of the features of trauma-informed environments – everyone's role is important and therefore needs to be integrated into the whole system.

Those organizations that pay attention to the need for integration, which is far more difficult than getting one part rather than the whole to work well, are likely to become the most effective type of organization.

Neural integration is not assisted – indeed is actively impeded – by unintegrated human services which are not only compartmentalised, but which lack basic trauma awareness. (Kezelman and Stavropoulos, 2012, p.xxx)



“I think the most important issue is learning to work together, actually, and building teams of people who understand how to do that in creative ways. Because we have all got to move out of the silos that have been put down for us by the public sector and they are often there in business and learn how to join things up.”
(Mawson, 2012)

Leadership and Management

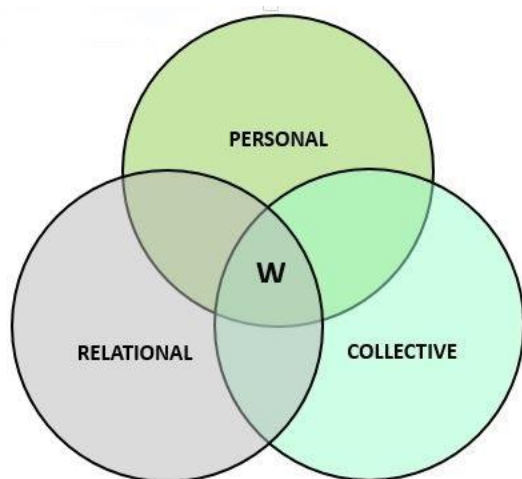
For a service to be effective, management and therapy need to be integrated successfully. Good management is necessary for therapy to take place and sometimes good management is therapeutic. The same could be said about any kind of practice in human services – it can only be truly effective in a well-managed context.

It can be argued that the key task of leadership is to provide the conditions in which organizational integration takes place.

Vision is crucial to create an inspiring and important mission. So is doing the job at hand, however mundane or unpleasant it may seem. It is the integration of the two that is critical.

Micro and Macro

In working with traumatized children both the micro and macro levels are important, but it is when there is a synergy between them that there is the greatest potential for recovery. For a child, this synergy would be like having a safe and attuned relationship with a primary carer, within a healthy partnership between parents, within a caring extended family, and within a safe and thriving community.



My first three parts on integration have moved from the micro-level of the individual brain to the macro-level of leadership, organizations, and society. While this might seem a little awkward, I think it is essential. We can't consider the individual as an isolate. We are all part of a wider system. As Prilleltensky (2006) has shown, well-being is about the integration of the individual, relational and collective levels.

Both the individual and the community are plastic, i.e., capable of recovery and growth, however difficult and traumatic their histories.

The network patterns of the outside world mimic a lot of the network patterns of the internal world (Johnson, 2010).

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Patrick Tomlinson Brief Bio



The primary goal of Patrick's work is the development of people and organizations. Throughout his career, he has identified development to be the driving force related to positive outcomes - for everyone, service users, professionals, and organizations.

His experience spans from 1985 in the field of trauma and attachment-informed services. He began as a residential care worker and has been a team leader, senior manager, Director, CEO, consultant, and mentor. He is the author/co-author/editor of numerous papers and books. He is a qualified clinician, strategic leader, and manager.

Working in many countries, he has helped develop therapeutic models that have gained national and international recognition. In 2008 he created Patrick Tomlinson Associates to provide services focused on development for people and organizations. The following services are provided,

- Therapeutic Model Development
- Developmental Mentoring, Consultancy, & Clinical Supervision
- Character Assessment & Selection Tool (CAST): for Personal & Professional Development, & Staff Selection
- Non-Executive Director

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