

*Breaking the Cycle by Solving for Pattern*¹

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This presentation has three parts:

1. Setting the Stage
2. Epigenetic Landscapes
3. Solving for Pattern

Setting the Stage

David Matlock's and Michelle Perkins's essay² is the central focus of this presentation; their essay has three parts:

1. Trauma and Trauma-Informed Practices
2. A Plan for Action
3. And the Project Continues

Wendell Berry's important essay³ can be used to contextualize the Caddo Parish case study; Berry's essay also has three parts:

1. Three types of solutions (two bad, one good)
2. A case study in Solving for Pattern (Earl Spencer's farm)
3. Critical standards for Solving for Pattern (fourteen in all)

Judge Matlock begins by describing the impact of relational trauma on the children who appear in his court:

In my 25 years as a juvenile judge, I have seen many children who were molested by an adult member of the child's household or family. Prior to the onset of the molestation, the child was friendly and doing okay in school, but, afterward, became withdrawn or began acting out. This was followed by poor grades and bad conduct reports, and then a cascade of other behavioral and emotional issues, including negative peer associations, unhealthy relationships, sexual acting out and drug-seeking behaviors. Each new unhealthy behavior brought its own new wave of trauma, followed by more and steadily worsening trauma-causing behaviors. (p. 182)

¹ An invited presentation for the 2021 Judicial Trauma Institute, hosted by the Supreme Court of Texas Children's Commission.

² Judge David N. Matlock and A. Michelle Perkins. Caddo Parish Juvenile Court: Trauma-informed practices come to juvenile court. *Louisiana Bar Journal*, 68(3):182-184, 186, November 2020

³ Wendell Berry. Solving for pattern. In Norman Wirzba, editor, *The art of the commonplace: The agrarian essays of Wendell Berry*, pages 267-285. Counterpoint, Berkeley, CA, 2002

Trauma One

Judge Matlock continues by describing some unintended consequences that arise when children are removed from their homes:

The child may have been removed from his/her home to prevent further maltreatment to the child or due to the child's own escalating and dangerous behaviors. The removal was often followed by a series of disrupted foster home placements, progressively more unsettling placements in shelters, group homes, psychiatric facilities, hospitals and, eventually perhaps, incarceration. At each new stage of placement, the child was exposed to increasingly restrictive conditions and more toxic interactions with increasingly troubled peers leading, predictably, to new traumas experienced by an increasingly fragile and demoralized child. (p. 182)

Trauma Two

Let's now switch perspective and view this through the lens of Wendell Berry's "Solving for Pattern;" Berry begins describing one kind of "bad" solution:

There is, first, the solution that causes a ramifying series of new problems, the only limiting criterion being, apparently, that the new problems should arise beyond the purview of the expertise that produced the solution — as, in agriculture, industrial solutions to the problem of production have invariably caused problems of maintenance, conservation, economics, community health, etc., etc. (p. 1)

Solution One

He then describes a second kind of "bad" solution:

The second kind of solution is that which immediately worsens the problem it is intended to solve, causing a hellish symbiosis in which problem and solution reciprocally enlarge one another in a sequence that, so far as its own logic is concerned, is limitless — as when the problem of soil compaction is "solved" by a bigger tractor, which further compacts the soil, which makes a need for a still bigger tractor, and so on and on. . . . It is characteristic of such solutions that no one prospers by them but the suppliers of fuel and equipment. (p. 2)

Solution Two

If you look carefully, and think about what you are seeing, you can see the "Solution One" pattern in both "Trauma One" and "Trauma Two," above. Neither the parents involved in "Trauma One" nor the professionals involved in "Trauma Two" *intend* for these trauma cascades to happen, but they do happen. You can also see the "Solution Two" pattern in the last sentence of "Trauma Two," so both of Wendell Berry's "bad" solutions can be seen in Judge Matlock's descriptions. Berry elaborates on the nature of "bad" solutions (next page):

These two kinds of solutions are obviously bad. They always serve one good at the expense of another or of several others, and I believe that if all their effects were ever to be accounted for they would be seen to involve, too frequently if not invariably, a net loss to nature, agriculture, and the human commonwealth.

Such solutions always involve a definition of the problem that is either false or so narrow as to be virtually false. To define an agricultural problem as if it were solely a problem of agriculture — or solely a problem of production or technology or economics — is simply to misunderstand the problem, either inadvertently or deliberately, either for profit or because of a prevalent fashion of thought. The whole problem must be solved, not just some handily identifiable and simplifiable aspect of it. (p. 2)

Bad Solutions

Berry's interest in "Solving for Pattern" is with farming, conservation, and the health of human communities, and his concern is with solutions that "involve a definition of the problem that is either false or so narrow as to be virtually false." It seems to me that this is exactly what we have done in child welfare when we define the problem of relational trauma in terms of the child's removal from their home. We need to do better, and we can. Judge Matlock continues his presentation as follows:

This series of events can be stopped and even reversed if, early in the process, the child begins receiving effective *trauma-focused* mental health treatment and is able to live in a home and school environment with caregivers who are well informed about *what behaviors to expect* and how to respond to a child who has been severely traumatized. (p. 182)

Trauma Three

And this leads naturally to Berry's third type of solution:

Perhaps it is not until health is set down as the aim that we come in sight of the third kind of solution: that which causes a ramifying series of solutions — as when meat animals are fed on the farm where the feed is raised, and where the feed is raised to be fed to the animals that are on the farm. Even so rudimentary a description implies a concern for pattern, for quality, which necessarily complicates the concern for production. The farmer has put plants and animals into a relationship of mutual dependence, and must perforce be concerned for balance or symmetry, a reciprocating connection in the pattern of the farm that is biological, not industrial, and that involves solutions to problems of fertility, soil husbandry, economics, sanitation — the whole complex of problems whose proper solutions add up to health: the health of the soil, of plants and animals, of farm and farmer, of farm family and farm community, all involved in the same interrelated, interlocking pattern — or pattern of patterns.

Solution Three

A relevant perspective on “bad” and “good” solutions is shown in Figure 1 on this page. The two frameworks shown in the figure were derived from interviews with parents and teachers, but we have found the *Willfully Disobedient* framework, in particular, to be characteristic of juvenile justice settings, including juvenile courts and juvenile services. At the KPICD, we sometimes view our work as helping organizations move from the left-hand side of Figure 1 to the right-hand side.

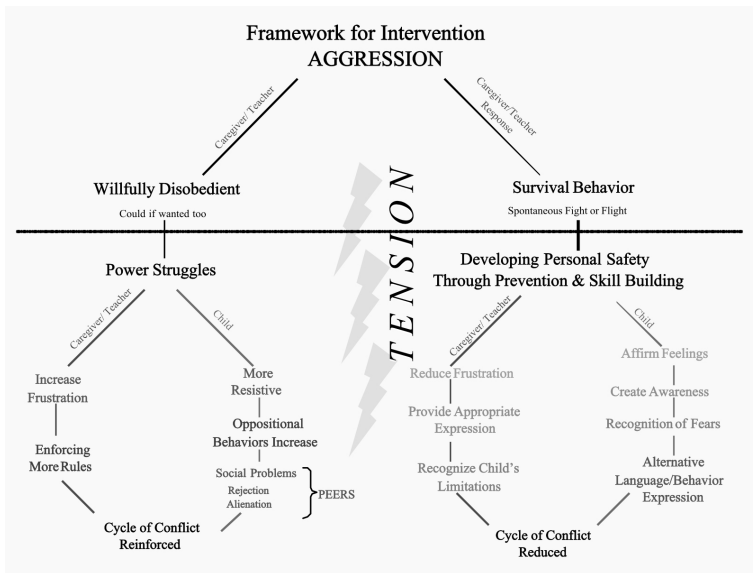


Figure 1: This diagram depicts two frameworks for responding to aggression (challenge): The *Willfully Disobedient* framework assumes (implicitly) that the child’s behavior is both intentional and rational — “They could if they wanted to.” In contrast, the *Survival Strategy* framework assumes (explicitly) that the child’s behaviors — fight, flight, or freeze — have been shaped by their trauma histories. The patterns depicted for the *Willfully Disobedient* framework reflect Berry’s “Solution One” and “Solution Two,” whereas the pattern depicted for the *Survival Strategy* framework reflects Judge Matlock’s “Trauma Three” and Wendell Berry’s “Solution Three.” Source: Henry et al. [2007]

Figure 1 compares a “bad” solution with a “good” solution; Wendell Berry compares “bad” and “good” solutions as follows:

A bad solution is bad, then, because it acts destructively upon the larger patterns in which it is contained. It acts destructively upon those patterns, most likely, because it is formed in ignorance or disregard of them. A bad solution solves for a single purpose or goal, such as increased production. And it is typical of such solutions that they achieve stupendous increases in production at exorbitant biological and social costs.

A good solution is good because it is in harmony with those larger patterns — and this harmony will, I think, be found to have a nature of analogy. A bad solution acts within the larger pattern the way a disease or addiction acts within the body. A good solution acts within the larger pattern the way a healthy organ acts within the body. But it must at once be understood that a healthy organ does not — as the mechanistic or industrial mind would like to say — “give” health

Bad vs Good Solutions

to the body, is not exploited for the body's health, but is *a part* of its health. The health of organ and organism is the same, just as the health of organism and ecosystem is the same. And these structures of organ, organism, and ecosystem — as John Todd has so ably understood — belong to a series of analogical integrities that begins with the organelle and ends with the biosphere. (p. 3)

Epigenetic Landscapes

Judge Matlock continues his introductory narrative by introducing the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) studies:

Much of the awareness of the effects of childhood trauma arises out of the landmark Centers for Disease Control and Kaiser Permanente ACEs study in 1998. From 1995–97, a group of scientists studied the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on the mental and physical health of 17,000 adults. This showed that “ACEs disrupt neurodevelopment and can have lasting effects on brain structure and function — the biologic pathways that likely explain the strength of the findings from the ACE Study.” (p. 182)

An excellent resource for ACEs is Donna Jackson Nakazawa's book, *Childhood disrupted: How your biography becomes your biology, and how you can heal* [Nakazawa, 2015]. The infographic shown in Figure 2 on this page provides a nice summary.

ACEs Studies

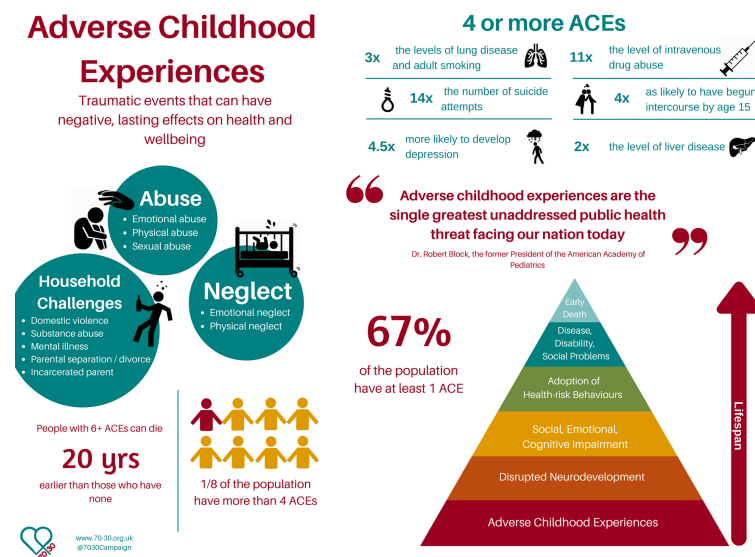


Figure 2: The most important findings from research on *Adverse Childhood Experiences* are summarized in this infographic: (a) the ten ACEs are listed in the teal balloons: Household Challenges, Abuse, Neglect. (b) Two-thirds of the U.S. population have one or more ACEs, whereas one-eighth have four or more ACEs. (c) ACEs predict a wide range of health and mental health outcomes, including lung disease, drug abuse, suicide, sexual promiscuity, depression, and liver disease. (d) ACEs initiate a toxic developmental cascade that ends in early death. More information about ACEs is available at acestoohigh.org, including the ACEs questionnaire and a resilience questionnaire.

If we are to fully appreciate the intergenerational cycle (pattern) of abuse and neglect, it is useful to explore the mechanisms that support intergenerational transmission of ACEs [see Hays-Grudo and Morris, 2020]. Figure 3 on this page summarizes the array of biological and environmental factors that can canalize vulnerability (and resilience) across generations; Figure 4 introduces the notion of an *epigenetic landscape*.

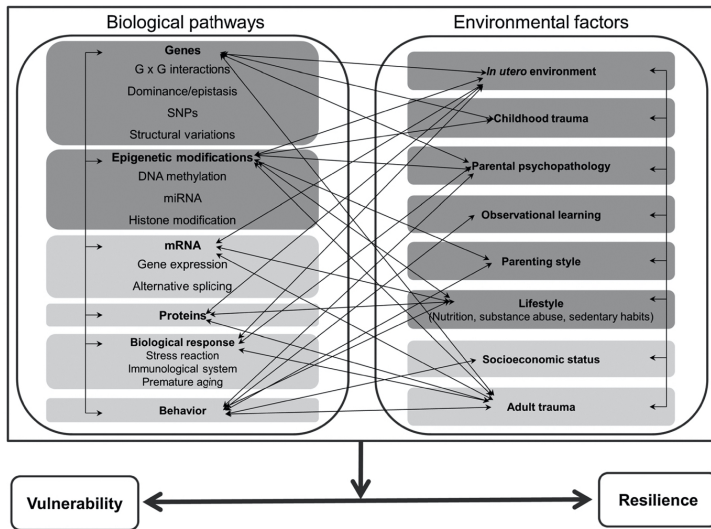


Figure 3: Epigenetic modifications represent one piece of the complex puzzle linking trauma experiences to an elevated risk of health and mental health problems. The arrows indicate interacting pathways between the biological and environmental factors that are more commonly described in the research literature. The dark gray shading represents the major factors involved in the intergenerational transmission of possible consequences of trauma, which include not only internal factors such as epigenetic modifications, but also learned behavioral patterns and acquired lifestyles. The major take-away from this diagram is that intergenerational transmission of ACEs is not “simply” a matter of learned behaviors, but also depends on internal (epigenetic) mechanisms and external (sociological) mechanisms such as socioeconomic status. Source: Ramo-Fernández et al. [2015]

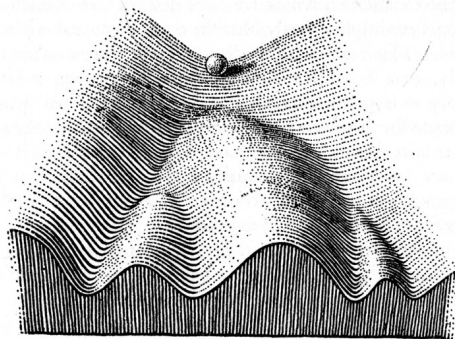


FIGURE 4
Part of an Epigenetic Landscape. The path followed by the ball, as it rolls down towards the spectator, corresponds to the developmental history of a particular part of the egg. There is first an alternative, towards the right or the left. Along the former path, a second alternative is offered; along the path to the left, the main channel continues leftwards, but there is an alternative path which, however, can only be reached over a threshold.

Figure 4: Conrad Waddington was an embryologist who made significant contributions to the emerging field of genetics during the mid-twentieth century [Slack, 2002]. One of his most influential and enduring concepts is the *epigenetic landscape*. Waddington was primarily interested in the developmental pathways taken by individual germ cells, which start out all alike, but then differentiate to become specialized tissues (e.g., skin, liver, neuron). John Bowlby, the father of attachment theory, seized upon this idea and applied it the development of a single child, as opposed to a single cell. According to this view, a child’s development might branch one way in the presence of “good enough” parenting, but another way in the presence of significant relational trauma. The specific configuration of the landscape would depend on some complex interaction between the factors listed in Figure 3. The main point I want to make is this: When we are solving for pattern, as described in Matlock and Perkins [2020], our goal is change the landscape — flatten to ridges — so that it is easier for a young person to change their pathway through their epigenetic landscape.

Solving for Pattern

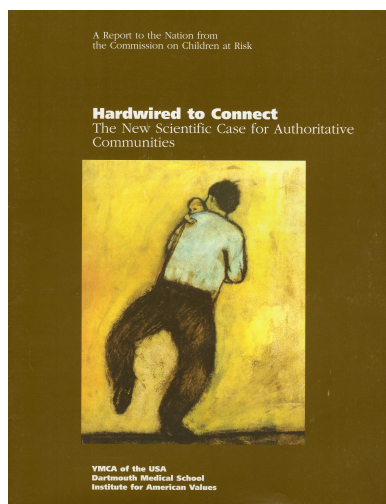
In the second part of their article, Matlock and Perkins [2020] describe their *Plan of Action*, which began with forming a *Strategic Planning Group for Trauma*, which in turn created four working groups:

1. Screening, Assessment and Referral Group
2. Treatment Capacity and Training Team
3. Caregiver Training/TBRI® Group
4. Multidisciplinary Trauma Intervention Team

After describing the efforts of each working group, the authors update their implementation story in the final section of their article, *And the Project Continues*. Since you have access to their article, I am not going to summarize their story. Instead, with the time I have left I will contextualize the Caddo Parish story, by viewing this story through the lens of Wendell Berry's set of *Critical Standards* (p. 4). Berry sets these out for agriculture, but they apply with equal force to child welfare and juvenile services. I don't have time to address them all, so I will focus on three, starting with Standard Two:

(2) A good solution accepts also the limitations of discipline. Agricultural problems should receive solutions that are agricultural, not technological or economic. (p. 5)

What are the "limitations of discipline" that pertain to trauma-informed practice in a court setting? In my view, Matlock and Perkins [2020] provide the answer in the third paragraph of their article: "Relational trauma requires relational healing." (see Figure 5)



Standard Two

Figure 5: The Commission on Children at Risk (CCR) was created at the turn of the millenia to address the conditions of childhood in the United States [see Commission on Children at Risk, 2003]. The CCR made two observations: "Our waiting lists are too long," and "Our intellectual models are inadequate." Based on recent advances in the neural and developmental sciences, they also concluded that children are "Hardwired to Connect." The solution proposed by the CCR was *Authoritative Communities* — communities that provide opportunity for meaningful relationships in every aspect of a child's life. In my view, Judge Matlock has been creating an authoritative community for the children and youth served by his court.

(10) Good solutions exist only in proof, and are not to be expected from some absentee owners or absentee experts. Problems must be solved in work and in place, with particular knowledge, fidelity, and care, by people who will suffer the consequences of their mistakes. There is no theoretical or ideal practice. (p. 6)

Standard Ten

To be sure, Judge Matlock and his team sought out and received input from others, but there can be no mistaking that “Trauma-Informed Practices Come to Juvenile Court” is a *local* story, initiated and implemented by *local* people, based on *local* needs and resources. How did they do this? There are a number of ways one could look at this highly local process of solving for pattern, one of which is through the lens of the *Cynefin Framework* (see Figure 6 on this page).

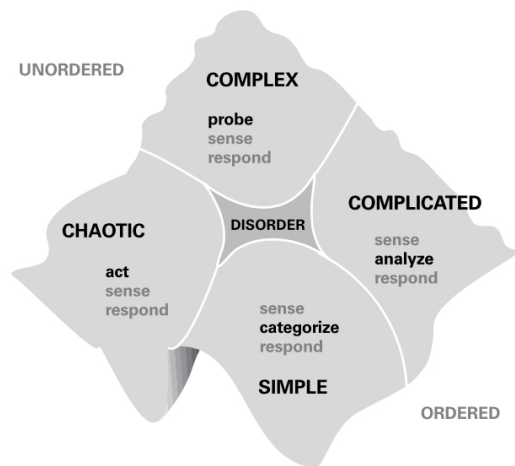


Figure 6: The basic premise of the Cynefin Framework is that there are different types of situations, and leaders (judges) should be able to align their actions and decisions to the context. There are two broad categories, *ordered* and *unordered*, and within each category there are two subtypes. Judicial practice will necessarily involve all four contexts, but the work described by Judge Matlock and Michelle Perkins took place primarily in the *complex domain*, which is the domain of *relationships*. Acting together, while solving for pattern, teams, groups, and communities must *probe* the problem space in order to identify, create, and support *emerging practice*. Source: Snowden and Boone [2007]

As part of their discussion, Snowden and Boone [2007] discuss a particular leadership case, as an example of how the Cynefin Framework can be applied (p. 8):

During the Palatine murders of 1993, Deputy Chief Gasior faced four contexts at once. He had to take immediate action via the media to stem the tide of initial panic by keeping the community informed (chaotic); he had to help keep the department running routinely and according to established procedure (simple); he had to call in experts (complicated); and he had to continue to calm the community in the days and weeks following the crime (complex). That last situation proved the most challenging. Parents were afraid to let their children go to school, and employees were concerned about safety in their workplaces. Had Gasior misread the context as simple, he might just have said, “Carry on,” which would have done nothing to reassure the community. Had he misread it as complicated, he might have called in experts to say it was safe—risking a loss of credibility and trust. Instead, Gasior set up a forum for business owners, high school students, teachers, and parents to share concerns and hear the facts. It was the right approach for a complex context: He allowed solutions to emerge from the community itself rather than trying to impose them.

(13) It is the nature of any organic pattern to be contained within a larger one. And so a good solution in one pattern preserves the integrity of the pattern that contains it. (p. 7)

Standard Thirteen

The work reported in Matlock and Perkins [2020] has unfolded within a number of larger patterns that encompass it, including the larger pattern that has given rise to this conference on trauma and judicial practice. However, there is one pattern that is directly relevant Judge Matlock’s work, and that is the ongoing project being implemented in Louisiana by Crossroads NOLA in partnership with the KPICD (see Figure 7, on this page).

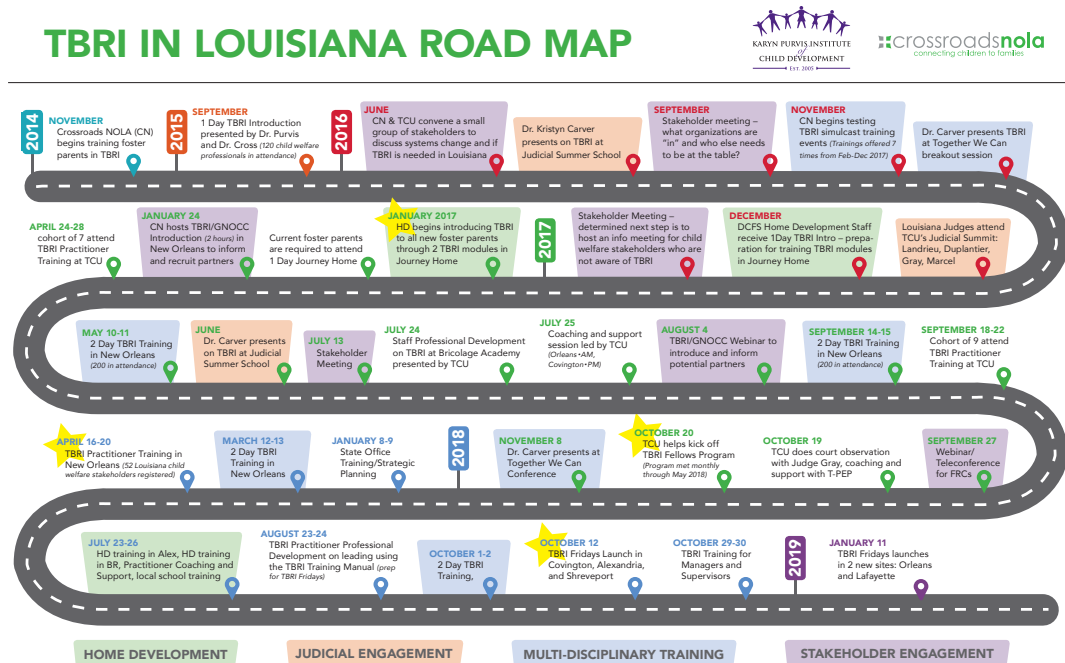


Figure 7: This graphic shows highlights of the journey being taken by Crossroads NOLA and their partners in the State of Louisiana, beginning in November of 2014, continuing through January of 2019. This journey started in the home of Anna and Jon Palmer, with their own adopted children, and then expanded to the work of Crossroads NOLA, equipping adopted and foster parents with trauma-informed skills and practices. The journey has now expanded to include multiple stakeholders in communities throughout Louisiana.

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