MCDOUGALD TERRACE, DURHAM

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A student working in an academic and mentoring program in a Durham, North Carolina, housing project must decide how to respond to a disruptive 6-year-old student whose mother needs the childcare the program provides to stay in her own job.

This case draws out the conflict between the boy's need for individual attention and the class's need for safety and for the teacher's time, as well as the larger tension between the student's desire to "make a difference" and the community's need for childcare. These conflicts help students to understand the critical role of intelligent program design and preparation and they point to the importance of better understanding broader issues related to poverty and to personal behavior.

Please refer to the "Ethics of Engagement" overview at the end of this document to familiarize yourself with the general ethical framework this case was created to illustrate.

John's summer placement site, McDougald Terrace, is a housing project populated by many transitory residents, including a large number of children. Child abuse, domestic violence, and drug abuse are rampant in the community. John has been asked to implement a summer program that has been developed for the children who live there. He is very excited and committed to making a difference in their lives and hopes to build relationships that he can maintain once the semester resumes. John realizes that many of the children will need extra attention. The program is divided so that he teaches school subjects on Monday and Tuesday; he conducts camp activities on Wednesday and Thursday, including many field trips and outdoor activities; and on Friday he mentors the students, focusing on helping them build interpersonal relationships.

As he settles into the summer, John faces many disappointments. He finds that he spends most of his time disciplining the students, rather than teaching them, playing with them or mentoring them. He realizes that McDougald Terrace has very different rules for child-raising than what he anticipated. Parents allow children as young as five-years-old to go unsupervised. John observes a lot of neglect among the children, in terms of not bathing regularly, not being medically attended to, and not eating balanced meals. The parents view John as a babysitter. He quickly learns about the foster care system – that children are moved around from home to home and often face abuse and neglect in settings in which they don't have anyone who knows to watch out for them. Structurally, he realizes that the program design is flawed because the children tend to view him only as an authority figure, which is what he aims to be in the classroom Monday and Tuesday, but the other days of the week John hopes to be viewed as a friend.

One day one of John's students, a six-year-old boy Zack, threatens to kill his classmates. John knew Zack's twelve-year-old brother had, in fact, shot another boy. A week ago Zack's mother pulled John aside and explained that her son had been experiencing a lot of problems recently, and she was so grateful that the program provided childcare for him during the day. She shared that she was under a lot of pressure at work. In fact, if she missed one more day, she would be fired. John doesn't believe that he or the students are in danger based on Zack's threats, but he also knows that this kind of behavior is serious and unacceptable. His class is filled with 20 students, and Zack is taking up nearly all of his time. John has to decide between sending Zack home, where he would be alone and unsupervised, keeping Zack in the classroom knowing that he will likely spend a disproportionate amount of class time addressing his behavior, or calling the local police and getting Social Services involved, knowing that Zack might be removed from his home and placed in the foster care system.

Overview of Ethics of Engagement Case Studies

These case studies were developed as part of a workshop series the Kenan Institute for Ethics provided for students preparing for intensive civic engagement experiences. The goals for the summer experience were three-fold: to gain self-knowledge, to deepen students' commitment to life-long civic engagement, and to help the communities in which they lived and worked for the summer. Student projects took place in local and global locations, ranging from working with African immigrants in Ireland, to documenting social change movements in South Africa, to managing environmental organizations in Portland, Oregon.

We have included two cases based on actual student experiences in the field--one domestic, set in Durham, North Carolina, and another abroad, set in Muhuru Bay, Kenya. These cases set forward the ethical dilemmas the students faced on personal, organizational, and systemic levels. They also present scenarios in which there is no clear right answer. Rather, the students in each case study are challenged by seemingly intractable problems for which there seem to be only wrong and perhaps less wrong solutions.

In constructing the teaching notes, we referred to the "Right-Right Dilemmas" paradigm drawn from Rush Kidder's book, *How Good People Make Tough Choices*. We modified this concept, suggesting that the students will likely face "Wrong-Wrong Dilemmas" in their summer placements, in which both the community and individual goods are compromised; neither loyalty nor truth can be fully achieved; long-term and short-term prospects are equally pessimistic; and neither justice nor mercy can be experienced by all those affected by the dilemma.

In the workshop, we also introduced the students to three "Resolution Principles," which we offered as frameworks to enable clear thinking about ethical dilemmas. These principles are the classical ethical principles of

> *Utilitarianism* - providing the greatest good for the greatest number
>
> *Deontology / Principle-Based (Kantianism)* - following the highest principle as absolutely as possible
>
> *Care-Based* - emphasizing the importance of relationships and paying attention to the particular context and individuals involved

After reading the cases, students in the workshop were divided into small groups to discuss the questions listed in the teaching notes and then returned to the large group for a facilitator-led discussion. Given the significance and difficulty of the tensions faced by the characters in the cases, a good session often ended with significant debate, rather than consensus about a right course of action.

Our aim with these cases is to provide students preparing for civic engagement experiences with tools they will find helpful as they face morally serious dilemmas in real-world contexts radically different than those in a university setting.