

Teaching Notes

MUHURU BAY, KENYA

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An American student at a civic engagement site is faced with the choice of whether, against the express wishes of the community, to take an HIV-positive child on a dangerous overnight drive to a medical clinic. The next day, the student's situation is further complicated by her group's decision to call in a medical helicopter to evacuate a fellow student who has been bitten by a scorpion.

This case presses students to assess trade-offs between relieving suffering in the short-term and setting a precedent the program can't sustain in the long run and between helping an individual and respecting the wishes of the local community. At the same time, the specific dilemmas raise the broader issue of what a more systemic approach to solving problems of health care delivery might look like and what kind of knowledge students will need to advance such an approach.

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

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Issues: This case draws out two of the classic Right-Right Dilemmas: short-term versus long-term and individual versus community. It also presents a dilemma between the local values of the people in the placement site and what may be perceived as more progressive, modern values that the American students bring to the context. The questions below are designed to facilitate class discussion.

1. *What are the challenges to acting ethically in this case?*

This case raises the issue of fairness – between the girl and the American student and between the girl and other sick children in the community. Exactly what does fairness look like in this context?

2. *Can you identify any Right-Right, Right-Wrong, or Wrong-Wrong Dilemmas?*

Short-term vs. Long-Term:

Anticipated short-term benefits of taking the girl to clinic include relieving her suffering and possibly saving her life and bonding more closely with the girl to encourage her development.

Longer-term drawbacks include setting a precedent of providing healthcare for the children that the American non-governmental organization (NGO) can't maintain; leaving an impression of showing favoritism among the students; recognizing that because the girl likely has AIDS her condition will not sustainably improve; and concern about the NGO's image in the community in that if aid was provided, the NGO may be viewed positively ("they really cared for her") or negatively ("they overstepped their bounds").

Individual vs. Community:

The Western world tends to prioritize individual well-being over that of community. By taking this one child to the clinic, the American students are expressing their value of the individual.

The community likely recognizes the significant dangers on the road leading to the clinic. They may also anticipate the potential backlash that taking the girl to the clinic will cause due to it being perceived as unfair.

Students should recognize that treating one girl in one village won't make an impact on the millions of other African children who need medical care. Suggest that a longer-term solution involve studying barrier to healthcare delivery in Africa.

3. *How would you respond in this situation? How would you justify your response?* Push students to identify the resolution principles that underlie their resolution attempts. Draw out questions that each resolution principle leads the students to ask:

Utilitarianism – Can we replicate this for every child here? Given her long-term prognosis, is going to the clinic the best use of our limited resources?

Principle-Based – What is the highest principle that should be followed? Preservation of individual life? Providing the best healthcare the participants in the situation have access to?

Care-Based – If you were the girl, how might you want this to be resolved?

1. *What would change if the context was different? If the girl was bitten by a scorpion? If the week before, villagers had been car-jacked along the same road? How do these changes impact your decision and justifications for the decision?*

Students should recognize that context matters and affects our decisions.

Tie up conversation by emphasizing the importance of preparation, critical reflection, and follow-up. Especially with critical reflection and follow-up, students should be asking themselves when they face these Wrong-Wrong Dilemmas, “What is the burning question this situation raises? How can I prevent similar situations from arising?” Students should be invited to study, learn, and work toward ameliorating the circumstances leading to such Wrong-Wrong Dilemmas.

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.