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## Service-Learning on American Campuses: Challenges for Pedagogy and Practice [1]

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Over the past twenty years, there has been a steady increase in the number of students involved in community service and service-learning programs on college campuses. A recent report by Campus Compact (2003) noted that 33 percent of college students on its member campuses were engaged in community service programs during the last academic year. Surveys by Compact found that eleven percent of higher education faculty offered an average of 30 service-learning courses on campuses (Campus Compact 2003, 2003a). Increasingly, institutions of higher education are supporting these efforts by establishing community service and service-learning offices, staffing them, and by providing institutional means to advance their mission on campuses.

Similar trends are evident in K-12 education. Fiske reports that between the years 1984 and 1997, the number of students engaged in service-learning rose from 900,000 to over 12 million while the proportion of students involved in such programs increased from 2 percent to 25 percent in the same period (2001). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (1999), "Sixty four percent of all public schools, including 83 percent of public high schools, had students participating in community service activities recognized by and/or arranged through the school." The popularity of these experiences among the educators is reflected in the growing trend to make service a requirement for graduation from high school and in the dramatic increase in the number of students participating in community service or service-learning during their high school careers.

These community service requirements for graduation are controversial. Court challenges in California, New York, North Carolina, and Maryland have argued that "mandatory voluntarism" is an oxymoron and that compulsory service undermines the true purpose of service to community (Dundjerski and Gray 1998; ECS 1999). A stronger argument for service can be made when the community experience is directly and deliberately linked to academic objective. Research has demonstrated that well structured service and service-learning experiences result in positive outcomes for students in personal transformation, in critical thinking, in the ability to take the perspective of others, and in other desired outcomes (Eyler and Giles 1999). Research has also indicated that individuals who are exposed to community service in their childhood or adolescence are more likely to become engaged citizens, to contribute time and donate money to charity, and to be involved as volunteers when they are adults than children who have not had this experience (Independent Sector 2002). Despite the expansion of community service and service-learning programs on both the college and K-12 levels, one can safely say that the most profound benefits of these experiences and other community-based learning opportunities have yet to be realized in schools and on American campuses.

The purpose of this paper is to trace the development of the community service and service-learning movements in higher education and to provide some perspectives on service-learning. I will argue that service-learning is about not just about doing good but about good teaching and learning, as well. I will also argue that these developments in service-learning can be directly connected to our individual and community journeys as teachers and as learners. In the final section of this paper, I will rely on my own experience as a service-learning practitioner to discuss classrooms implications in the development of the service-learning movement.

This short history of recent service movements will focus on the "learning" side of the service equation. This development can be seen in four stages, with each step in the movement both solving a problem and surfacing a challenge leading to further development and extension in the field. For the purposes of this review, I am papering over, so to speak, the real tensions and conflicts that emerged in the movement and those that remain in this history. The tale that I intend to trace here is a very short history of ideas.

### Stage One: 1985-1990

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For purposes of this analysis, the current wave of interest in service-learning can be traced to the mid 1980s. Social critics characterized the cohort of students in college at this time as the "Me Generation." Heads of foundations, think tanks, educational leaders, and others complained that this generation was overly focused on careers and success in business. These organizations were concerned about an observed decline of student interest in public affairs and a drop in participation in

community service during their undergraduate years (Rhodes 1999). In response to these issues, several organizations emerged to advocate for the expansion of community and public service opportunities for college students. Most accounts of this history credit the work of several organizations including COOL (Campus Outreach Opportunity League), the NSEE (National Society for Experiential Education), and Campus Compact with bringing these issues to the attention of the higher education community (Jacoby 1996; Kupiec 1993). COOL was a new student-led organization, and NSEE an existing professional organization dedicated to the advancement of experiential education for adult and younger learners. Compact, founded in 1985 by college and university presidents, is widely recognized as the organization that has done the most to push service-learning into the higher education mainstream.

The early leaders of Campus Compact, presidents of Stanford, Brown, and Georgetown, did not believe in the idea of service simply for the sake of service and doing good. An argument was made that participating in public and community service would help students acquire the citizenship skills necessary for 'helping this country to be not simply a strong competitor but a responsible and effective leader in a complicated world (Rhodes 1997, p. 56). They assumed that direct exposure to homelessness, illiteracy, HIV-AIDS, environmental clean-up, and other issues during the college years would make for more informed students who could relate these service experiences to larger lessons about the need for public engagement and service after graduation (Smith 1994). Our over-simplified model of stage one looks like this.

## **SERVICE -> BETTER CITIZENS**

The research interests of the advocates of community service experiences focused on measuring outcomes, like changes in student attitudes and beliefs before and after service, the impact of community service on graduation rates and post-graduation civic engagement, the effect on service on career choice, and other measures (Giles, Honnet and Migliore 1991).

During the period, membership in Compact grew from four founding schools in 1985 to 235 member campuses in 1990. However, as any theorist of social change or social movements would predict, there were problems with the formula. The intended effects did not occur as predictably as the founders would have liked. Although at the time more campuses were providing more students with opportunities to do service, this activity was an extra-curricular one, not that these experiences were unimportant. Some research suggests that students often attribute their greatest learning in college to experiences outside the classroom (Pascarella and Terenzini 1991). However, at this stage, community service rested outside what was and what is the core of the university: that is, academic studies.

In an important report to the Executive Committee of the Campus Compact titled "Integrating Service with Academic Study," Tim Stanton (1990) advocated connecting service with academic work. While experiences in a homeless shelter provided students with an up close and personal exposure to those persons who suffered from homelessness, what more could be learned by linking this experience to a course in urban educational policy, to the Sociology of Stratification, to courses in literature that featured the Bleak House or a Tale of Two Cities by Dickens and other fictional works dealing with poverty or philanthropy [2], or to other courses? Not only might the community service experiences make the texts come alive, but these experiences could also provide the basis for classroom discussions, for reflective essays, and more engaged learning. In other words, well-crafted service experiences could provide a path to deeper learning. Students could look to the literature for questions and answers, could evaluate the applicability of competing theoretical perspectives, and could examine these texts by grounding them in realities that were pressing upon them. Forging this connection between service experiences and academics formed the second stage of this history.

## **Stage Two: 1990 - 1995**

Stage two began in 1990 and ended in 1995. By the end of this period, Compact membership had increased to more than 470 campuses. The key challenge at this point was integrating service into the curriculum. How could work in the community be connected to deeper learning? Could this occur across the curriculum or was it best suited to a few courses in sociology, social work, political science, and other disciplines most aligned with social problems and public policy? Jeremy Cohen (1994) contends community service experiences must be discretely and purposefully tied to the curriculum. Not all faculty members are familiar with the principles underlying experiential education. Service-learning, as a type of experiential education, relied on theorists like Kolb (1984), Dewey (1933,1938), and Perry (1970) to provide intellectual frameworks for course design. The oversimplified model or formula for stage two is as follows.

## **SERVICE + REFLECTION -> LEARNING**

The connection between experience and learning is not a simple one. Eyler and Giles (1999) identify the roles of reflection and service experience design as key to effective learning.

many of the intellectual goals of higher education, including learning and application of material, critical thinking and problem solving, and perspective transformation, depend not on service experience alone but on how well integrated theory and practice are through application and reflection...The quality of service-learning makes a difference (Eyler and Giles 1999, 166).

Professors must carefully design these experiences and must craft tools that harvest learning from them. A key challenge here is to assess and evaluate what has been and what should be learned via the service experience. There is no guarantee at all that student exposure to communities very different from their own will automatically result in the outcome one may desire. Students in one such course gave the professor the lowest ratings he had ever received on student evaluations (Marullo 1996). This occurred even when the course included rigorous reflection. Service-learning practitioners, like all faculty, are challenged to re-design and re-tool combinations of assignments and student experiences to optimize learning.

During this stage, which we can characterize as the struggle for legitimacy, Compact accomplished a great deal. Supported by funding from Kellogg, Ford, and other national foundations, along with the National Learn and Serve initiative supported by the Clinton administration, Compact led the charge to connect community service to academic courses. Despite the challenges of curricular change, the number of campuses offering service-learning courses grew each year and has continued to grow up to the present. Service-learning courses are offered in biology, architecture, sociology, English and composition, accounting, theatre, community health, philosophy, and in other disciplines throughout the curriculum. A multi-volume series published by the American Association of Higher Education features scholarly articles, syllabi, and related materials designed to connect service-learning with disciplinary interests [3]. In addition, disciplinary associations like the American Sociological Association have published collections of syllabi and teaching resources in service learning (Ender et al. 1996). Collections of service-learning syllabi are available on-line [04]. The Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, published since 1994, provides articles by leading researchers, scholars, and practitioners.

Curricular designs for service-learning vary significantly (Enos and Troppe 1996). At one end of a continuum, service learning can comprise a small part of the course, providing students with the option of being involved in a one-time service immersion experience, followed up by a short reflective essay. At the other end of the continuum, work in the community can serve as the course "text," providing the major focus of the course and student work. Examples of the latter include varieties of participatory-action and community-based research involving partnerships with agencies and grass roots groups where the parties negotiate research agendas that meet the organization's needs, use multiple methods to conduct research, and design projects so that research will have policy and action outcomes (Stoecker 2003). This form of service learning is gaining increased attention from faculty members who are interested in issues related to community development and empowerment. Some advocates of this approach aim to move service-learning from a charity model to one oriented to social justice, one that relies on community organizing and advocacy. In a recently published volume, *Community-Based Research and Higher Education: Principles and Practices* (Strand et al. 2003), Strand and her colleagues trace the history of community-based research, articulate the distinctions between traditional academic research and its community-based alternatives and, explore challenges surfaced in this work, and examine how community-based research can be integrated with teaching, and aligned with the core missions of higher education,

At stage two of development, research was directed to understanding pedagogical changes, investigating faculty and student responses to service-learning experiences, tracking institutionalization on campuses, and measuring the effectiveness of reflection strategies.

However, this infusion of service into courses, designed to address one issue - making the service experience richer in learning outcomes - brought up new questions and surfaced organizational challenges. Practitioners have been engaged in service-learning for decades but have referred to it in other ways, as community-based learning, as outreach, as practicum, field work or even internships [5]. However, when a group of individuals - faculty, staff, and in some instances students, and administrators - decides that service-learning experiences should be offered in the school, in the department, or on campus in a more intentional and extensive manner, issues of implementation and organization begin to surface. Implementing service-learning in a serious way creates a ripple effect. It begins to compete for recognition, support and rewards with existing pedagogy and practice. It may create momentum for other changes. And, if embraced by faculty advocates, enthusiastic students, and a supportive community, it makes demands on institutions. Discussions about curricular changes inevitably lead to deeper conversations about pedagogy and curricular content.

A university, department, or school committed to exposing all of its students or a significant core to a variety of projects that involve community work, where students gain skills and understand the public purposes of disciplines, where faculty are rewarded and embraced for research and teaching that honors community work, is a very different place from an institution where few faculty are engaged with community, where few faculty can afford in terms of time and energy to create worthwhile service experiences for their students, and where students are uncertain when they graduate whether they have the tools and skills they need to make a difference in the world (Gelmon 2003). The second stage of development in the service-learning movement created demands for changes in institutional support and funding, for the creation of administrative centers, for the formalization of service and service-learning, and for campuses and schools to link service-learning practice to their core mission and values. To use the proper vocabulary, the second stage of service-learning set the stage for the stage three - "the engaged campus."

### **Stage Three: 1996-2000**

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The third stage of our history occurred between 1995 and 2000 as membership of Campus Compact grew from 475 to 700 campuses, nearly one of every five campuses in the United States. The third stage of development moves campuses from places of minimal fragmented involvement to a deeper engagement with communities as equal partners. "The engaged campus" is a place where service to the community becomes a central feature of institutional mission and character. There are several good

models of these campuses with growing national reputations. Two years ago, U.S. News and World Report created a new category to rank campuses based on their service-learning programs [6]. Campuses receiving the highest ranks were Berea College, University of Pennsylvania, University of Southern California, Portland State University, and others. These colleges set an enviable standard for what academic institutions can do to serve the community in integrated, meaningful ways while embracing their core missions of teaching and research.

One issue here - evident from the earliest days of the service-learning movement - is that of relationships with partners and service sites. In Rhode Island alone, with a population of around one million residents, there are thousands of nonprofit organizations (NCCS 2002) and hundreds of public agencies and schools that could be potential partners. Finding an organization with whom one can develop a long-term mutually satisfying and challenging relationship requires an investment of time and energy on the parts of university and community members. Stage three prompts practitioners to critique service-learning from the vantage point of agencies and communities. With the growth of community service and service-learning programs, we see more students doing more service in the community. But, as many critics have asked, how much of the service is really important? Are these "make service" programs developed to help students fulfill a requirement for graduation or to fill out a resume? Or do these experiences really answer a community need without burdening it with another batch of volunteers to keep busy?

Increasingly, the service-learning literature urges practitioners to consider sites and organizations as partners, to be sensitive to the issues these organizations face, and to take into account the real needs of the communities. Many community organizers and leaders of nonprofit organizations are suspicious of the motives that underlie college service programs (Fisher 1997; Kretzman and McKnight 1993). While some communities may have long-standing problems, the interests of campuses, faculty members, and especially students may last no longer than the 14 week semester. In stage three, there is talk about sustained and significant institutional change. Re-vitalization of the community and public focus of our institutions become central foci of attention. The issue is not only reaching out to the community but also developing ways in which the community can reach into the college or university. How does the leader of a grass roots organization serving minority victims of domestic violence connect with faculty to develop outreach programs to underserved populations? How does she find the professor on campus willing and able to do this work? Besides "free" student help, what else can the campus offer? Here, there is a need to extend thinking beyond faculty and students in specific courses to deeper thinking about partnerships and sustained commitments. Besides exposing our students to populations that they may not typically come into contact with, what else do faculty members need from agencies? Are learning objectives enhanced by engaging community partners as co-teachers, sharing materials and reflection plans with them? What resources does the campus have that can be put to good use in the community or for community benefit, and vice versa? The most critical question here is how a campus organizes itself for engagement with the community. How can a campus be a better neighbor, not apart from community but a part of community?

Our equation for stage three of our history is as follows:

### **Engaged Campuses -> Deeper Partnerships -> Changes in Institutions**

Here we can think about relationships with community partners that allow each party to accomplish things they could not accomplish without the other. This also opens up opportunities for inter-disciplinary work. If the campus is organized around engagement, it can partner with homeless shelters and housing advocacy groups in more meaningful ways. Certainly, campuses cannot participate as partners in addressing important issues if faculty members cling solely to disciplinary perspectives. Is poverty a sociological issue? An economics issue? A problem only appropriate for the faculty in social work? Or perhaps we should refer these agencies to school of management and business? Or, more appropriately, these issues could command the attention of faculty and departments across the campus. Perhaps, work as an engaged campus would make a campus a unique place, defined by these relationships and others that may develop.

In stage three, researchers are interested in identifying the elements of good partnerships and engaged campuses, in examining the impact of engagement on the campus and the community, and in developing measures to assess the extent and quality of engagement.

### **Stage Four: 2000 - present**

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Stage four brings us to the present where membership in the Compact stands at 860 campuses (Campus Compact 2003a). The fourth stage focuses on civic engagement, by which its leaders mean our public spaces, our politics, and the ways in which our democratic processes are enacted and enlivened. Boyte and Kari refer to this as "public work" (1996). At this stage, service-learning takes another step where classroom and community work is linked to the project of renewing democratic practice. This challenge is set forth in a document called the *Presidents' Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education*.

The challenges facing higher education go beyond the need to add more service-learning experiences or to reward faculty for community-oriented research. As important as these objectives are, the more fundamental task is to renew our great mission as the agents of democracy. This task points to deep strategic challenges: how to tap and free the powers and talents of all elements of our school - our faculty, our students, our staff, our administrators - for public engagement? How to break down the artificial and arbitrary "silo cultures" that now

stifle creativity, connection, and community? How to renew throughout our institutional life and cultures a robust sense that our work contributes to the commonwealth of our communities, our nation and the world? (Campus Compact 1999)

This stage provokes discussion and consideration of the civic dimension of teaching, *and* strives to extend the civic role of institutions of higher education in their communities. It proposes that we teach students to be good citizens in a deliberate way. This expands our objectives of civic education far beyond motivating our current generation of students to vote. Halsted (1998) reports that college students are less likely than previous generations of young people to vote, to write to elected officials, or to work on political campaigns. Similarly, students do not believe that citizenship is important and tend to distrust elected officials and governmental institutions. Some have observed that while students are increasing engaged in community service, their participation in the electoral process has declined (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda and Yee 2002). Students may see their involvement in soup kitchens, in environmental monitoring, in tutoring children and in other placements as sound substitutes for voting and interest in politics. Long (2002) in the *New Student Politics* found that students see their involvement in service as in itself a political act but that few understand or have the skills to translate their experiences into action as citizens at the organizational- or policy-level.

This stage of development poses the question of what citizenship means in the 21st century and how we should best prepare students for that role. It also examines the civic role on institutions of higher education themselves. Like the engaged campus, the civic engagement stage explores the idea the college or university itself acts as an active citizen in the community, not just as a detached member of community. These questions challenge faculty members and administrators both as individual academic specialists as well as members of intellectual and civic communities to reevaluate their work and to extend it beyond traditional disciplinary and organizational boundaries.

In stage four, researchers are investigating how students, faculty members, and institutions understand their responsibilities as citizens. Also, of interest are the implications of the civic dimension for teaching, research and service obligations on campuses.

These four stages of development - beginning with community service, leading to service-learning, moving to engaged campuses, and then to civic engagement-- provide a quick overview of the history of this movement. In the rest of this paper, I will discuss how service-learning is connected to other reform movements in higher education. I will also examine how the personal is pedagogical, that is how the practice of this pedagogy pushes faculty members to become reflective practitioners. Here, I will rely on my own experience as a service-learning practitioner to make my case.

## Service-Learning as a Basis for Organizational Change

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Reform movements like the one sketched here rest on claims that they will "fix" something that is not working. Falling test scores, low levels of retention through graduation, students unprepared to work in an increasingly diverse workforce, results of survey data that students have little interest in current events, and other negative findings may prompt individual teachers, schools, communities, and others to "take action." Some problems are amenable to organizational change and simply require that institutions adjust their ways of doing business. However, as Parker Palmer writes, there are important distinctions between reforms that require organizational adjustments and those that call for "movement sensibilities." Service-learning is a good example of a reform that demands movement sensibilities. These sensibilities allow individuals to visualize new ways and approaches to doing their work, in other words, to think out of the box. Minor adjustments to the old ways of doing things may not create the sort of change that is required. He cautions, "[when an organizational mentality is imposed on a problem that requires movement sensibilities, the result is often despair]" (Palmer 1992, 12).

Service-learning presents an ideal staging arena to bring together several contemporary reform movements in higher education. Liu (1995) suggests that service-learning and its natural partners can provoke a paradigm change in classroom teaching but that such a change requires not just organizational re-adjustments but instead a significant re-evaluation of learning and teaching. The four-stage history outlined above also can be linked directly to developments in the scholarship of teaching and teaching as public work. Lee Shulman (1987) and Eugene Rice (1991) have argued for a broader view of scholarship, one that expands the current focus on the scholarship of discovery to the exclusion of other forms of scholarship, i.e., the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application, and the scholarship of teaching Boyer (1987, 1991 and 1994). Service-learning pedagogy is well suited to these others forms of scholarship, as well as the scholarship of discovery. Partnered with other promising educational reforms, service-learning can provide an important component to significant change in teaching and teaching on college campuses.

## The Personal as Pedagogical: Service-Learning and the Classroom

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Daily experiences in teaching speak loudly to the need to constantly re-examine what we are doing in our classrooms and to ask whether there are better ways to craft our work. Faculty must create the space to have conversations in the classroom about ideas, about how things work, and about students developing their own questions and learning agendas. Well-designed service-learning opportunities should fire up students' interests in learning about the world, in acquiring disciplinary tools to investigate social phenomena, and in showing faculty and others what they have really learned during the semester.

Like other pedagogies, service-learning can change practitioners. In some cases, these changes are transformational (Enos and Morton 2003). I have been teaching service-learning for about ten years now and find that my understanding of what I am doing with this pedagogy has changed significantly from my first attempt to integrate service into a course. My ambitions about what can be accomplished in the classroom where students are working in the community have expanded. My teaching about service and community involvement has become more nuanced. My own perspective now, one that I did not have when I began to provide students with service-learning options, is that it is important to problematize service and the service experience, not simply to assume that our actions in the community are full of charity and serve noble purposes. My work in service-learning has led me to a deepening intellectual interest in the nature of helping.

To deepen individual teaching practice in service-learning, I am a great believer in creating reflection portfolios [7]. A reflection portfolio is a faculty toolbox of strategies to teach service-learning. It can include journal articles, newspaper clippings, quotations, readings, cartoons, instructions for de-briefing and assessment, and other materials. These become an individualized reflection platform in which the portfolio is a marker for our development as teachers, as learners, and as members of communities. Since individual journeys in service-learning teaching are likely to be different, these portfolios will reflect faculty members' philosophy, what Kottkamp (1990) refers to as a platform, their aims in using this pedagogy, their teaching styles, and perhaps, how their instructional strategies have changed over the course of their teaching. My reflection portfolio features a compilation of articles, exercises, films, and other materials focused on the complicated nature of giving, helping, social justice, and social obligations. Assignments aim not only to help students assess their individual experiences but also to connect the work they are doing to the public dimensions of being an informed citizen.

## Summary

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Besides its intellectual power and civic promise, service-learning has strong and deep appeal to me because of its potential to create a more engaged faculty life. Faculty members often find themselves challenged to maintain balance among three competing responsibilities - research, teaching and service. A well-designed project that involves agencies and members of the community can be responsive to all those faculty obligations. Scholarship can be conducted that meets community needs as well as being intellectually and professionally rewarding. Coursework can be fashioned that engages students in work that helps them learn how to test theories, to understand how knowledge is created, and to work in diverse communities. Finally, service-learning can provide an important vehicle to renew and re-invigorate core missions of service and citizenship.

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## Endnotes

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[1] An earlier version of the paper titled "Where Service Learning Leads Us: Private and Public Journeys," was presented as the Feinstein Community Service Lecture, Rhode Island College, April 10, 2003.

[2] A very useful annotated bibliography "Philanthropy in Short Fiction" can be found at  
<<http://www.ulib.iupui.edu/libref/harmon.html>>. This was compiled by Joseph C. Harmon.

[3] Volumes in this series include those in Sociology called *Cultivating the Sociological Imagination (Sociology)*, *Experiencing Citizenship (Political Science)*, *Acting Locally, (Environmental Studies)*, *Connecting Past and Present (History)*, *Working for the Common Good (Management)*, *Creating Community-Responsive Physicians (Medical Education)*, *From Cloister to Commons (Religious Studies)*, and others. More information is available at the AAHE web page  
[http://www.aahe.org/service/series\\_new.htm](http://www.aahe.org/service/series_new.htm).

[4] See collections maintained by the University of Colorado-Boulder at <<http://csf.colorado.edu/sl/syllabi/index.html>> and by Campus Compact at <<http://www.compact.org/syllabi>>.

[5] See Mintz and Hesser's (1996) article that clearly differentiates service-learning from other curricular options and presents useful guidelines for course design.

[6] [http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/college/rankings/brief/acadprogs/acadprogso5\\_brief.php](http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/college/rankings/brief/acadprogs/acadprogso5_brief.php)

[7] I have created a reflection portfolio organized around the themes of helping and service. This includes several articles that have appeared in the New York Times and in other sources that address these complex issues. These deal with the dilemma of unanticipated consequences (Packer 2002, 2003; Knauss 2003), the challenges of identifying appropriate strategies for rendering assistance (Fisher 2002; Weinstein 2003), the ethics of helping (see an explanation of The Better Deed exercise in Morton and Enos, 2002) and others.

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