1. Teaching Objective:

   To teach students how to communicate ethically and empathically in relationships.

2. Rationale and Instructional Plan:

   Teaching Ethical Communication: Focusing on Empathy. Vetlesen (1993) defines empathy as “the specific cognitive-emotional precondition of moral capacity” (p. 383). Similarly, Thompson (2007) argues, “Empathy in a moral sense is a basic cognitive and emotional capacity underlying all moral sentiments and emotions one can have for another” (p. 401). Given these definitions, I believe that teaching empathic communication skills is important for several reasons. First, a growing body of research shows that “empathy [is] a psychological capacity prone to social-cognitive intervention such as through training or enhancement programs for sake of various goals...” (see Decety, 2005 p. 154 for a review). Consistent with these findings, my research shows that teaching empathic skills helps students understand how to respond ethically and compassionately when faced with challenging situations (e.g., comforting a sexual assault survivor, preventing sexual assault). Second, in 2003, one of our department-level assessment projects showed that the skill that entering majors least expected to learn in our undergraduate curriculum was empathy. In a similar way, an exit survey of senior, Communication Studies majors showed that the skill that students learned the least in our curriculum was empathy. Thus, conducting empathy-based trainings can begin to fill this critical void in our curriculum. Equally important, this empathy-based approach teaches students to respond humanely to difficulty situations in daily life, and thereby, promotes ethical conduct, civility and proactive social change in our community.
Ethical Issues, Instructional Design & Methodology: A Description of the Module

Contemporary Ethical Issues in Sexual Assault Prevention. Researchers define sexual assault as “forced sexual aggression or contact with or without penetration against a victim” (Black, Weisz, Coats, & Patterson, 2000, p. 589). Regrettably, the incidences of sexual assault on college campuses across the country are extremely high (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Mohler-Kuo, Dowdall, Koss, & Wechsler, 2004). For example, studies demonstrate that one out of four women attending college steadily report surviving sexual assault or attempted rape (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Mohler-Kuo, Dowdall, Koss, & Wechsler, 2004). Research also shows that date or acquaintance rape is an especially common form of assault among college students (Berkowitz, 1992; Holcomb, Sarvela, Sondag, & Hatton-Holcomb, 1993). Based on this alarming research evidence, sexual assault is an acute form of violence that constitutes a reprehensible breach of ethics, resulting in severely caustic and visceral trauma.

Nationally, the statistics regarding the number of women who have been sexually assaulted are staggering. According to Black, Weisz, Coats, & Patterson (2000), “24-50% of women have been or will be sexually assaulted during their lives” (p. 589). Moreover, in the weeks, months, and years following sexual assault, survivors may experience depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts or attempts, and poor self-esteem (Butterfield, Barnett, & Koons, 2000). In addition to the serious physical and psychological consequences that rape has on college students, “many women who are assaulted drop out of school” (Bohmer & Parrot, 1993, p. 1).

An especially prevalent form of sexual assault among college students is date rape “because they (college students) live in communities where many factors related to date or acquaintance rape, such as age, alcohol use, and rape-tolerant behavioral norms, converge” (Holcomb, Sarvela, Sondag, & Hatton-Holcomb, 1993, p. 159). To counteract these contextual influences and prevent sexual assault, COMM 110 provides empathy-based, sexual assault interventions that foster a “proactive” audience stance—the most participatory form of peer-education performance, inviting “viewer-participants” to take agency in their own learning (Pelias & VanOosting, 1987). I enhance this mode of learning by delivering the instructional module on ethical performance that I describe in the next section of this instructional plan.

Module Components. Students in COMM 110 participate in a 3-hour instructional module—including a detailed discussion of the Ethical Performance Model (EPM). The EPM is an original, theoretical framework that I created to
understand how individuals enact ethical and empathic behavior in different situations. The EPM is based on the ideology that “Being a moral person means that I am my brother’s [sister’s] keeper” (Bauman, 2002, p.51). This moral stance is enacted via five interrelated concepts: intention (goal), identity (role), agency (action), awareness (noticing/sensing) and context (situational factors). I discuss these concepts in a cogent PowerPoint presentation, providing: 1) the theoretical foundations of the EPM, 2) conceptual definitions of each component of the model, 3) application of each concept to ethical performance, and 4) implications for actual ethical/empathic behavior in the “real world.” The 3-hour module also includes a visual representation of the EPM that I use to display and discuss the components of the model.

Assessment. To assess the effectiveness of this module, I use a qualitative, thematic analysis of student portfolios and/or reflection on learning papers. These forms of assessment are the standards for best instructional practices in our discipline. The goal of this particular assessment is to help students cast themselves as ethical agents of change as they contemplate the needs and feelings of distressed others. To this end, I ask students to respond to five questions: “What role (identity) can you play in this scene or situation?”; “What is your goal (intention) in this scene or situation?”; “What can you do (agency) to be helpful in this situation or scene?”; “What is happening in this situation (context)?”;and “What can you sense (awareness) in this scene or situation?” These questions constitute the key elements of the EPM and are informed by a unique synthesis of my diverse record of scholarship.

The following section provides general descriptions of the lecture, activity, and assessment instrument.

3. Oral Communication Category Standards

- How to Enhance Ethical, Credible Communication Practices and Avoid Unethical, Non-credible Communication (what should or should not be done).

Lecture: The Ethical Performance Model: Theory, Research and Practice

Activity: Practicing Ethical Performance: A Proactive Demonstration

Assessment: Instructor Graded Portfolio Assignment

NOTE: *Instructor assesses the Portfolio Assignment as a demonstration of oral communication competence and ethical proficiency.
4. Sample Assessment: Portfolio Assignment

Reflection Questions:

1. As you respond to this scene (demonstration), what character can you play in this situation to be helpful? In other words, how can you play a helpful role? How can you be a helpful or useful person? What role can you play that is most helpful in this scene?

   For example: “I can play the role of ______...”

   **Your response (begin typing after the colon):**

2. As you respond to this scene (demonstration), what is your goal? What is your purpose? What helpful results can you attempt to create? What helpful consequence(s) can you try to achieve? What helpful outcome would you like to happen next in this situation?

   For example: “In this situation, my goal is _______ ...”

   **Your response (begin typing after the colon):**

3. As you notice this scene unfolding, what action(s) can you take to be helpful? What can you do—that is under your control—to make things better? What action can you take to be a helpful influence? How can you act in a way that is most beneficial?

   For example: “I can act in a helpful way by ______...”

   **Your response (begin typing after the colon):**

4. As you notice this scene unfolding, what do you see happening in this situation? What is going on in this scene? How does the situation change? What can be done to create a scene with helpful consequences? What can be done to make the situation better? What (if anything) can be done to change the situation in the most helpful way?

   For example: “I think that it might be helpful to change the situation by _____.“
Your response (begin typing after the colon):

5. As you see the scene unfolding, what are you noticing? What are you sensing? What are you witnessing? What are you intuiting? What insights are arising for you in this moment?

For example: “As I watch this scene, I sense that ______…”

Your response (begin typing after the colon):

5. Sample Assessment Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Point Value</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>You have not only completed the assignment, but also have given precise examples that demonstrate your knowledge, competence and proficiency with this material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>You have completed the assignment and answered every question accurately, however more detail could have been added throughout. Minor grammar and spelling errors may also be apparent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>You have completed and met the average expectation for the assignment. Some questions may not have been fully addressed and answers need more clarification.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Something is missing from the assignment. You did not complete it in its entirety and have met less than the minimum expectation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Significant portions of the assignment are missing and/or incomplete. Assignment is marked by minimal effort.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Selected References


