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Rethinking Our Approach to the Basic Course: Making Ethics the Foundation of Introduction to Public Speaking

Jon A. Hess

Six years ago I published an article in the *Basic Communication Course Annual* on teaching ethics in the basic course (Hess, 1993). During the ensuing years I have reflected on that article in light of my own attempts — both as a classroom instructor and as a basic course director — to help my students simultaneously develop goal effectiveness and ethical responsibility in their public speaking. My experience has left me satisfied that the information contained within that article is very useful. At the same time, however, I have become convinced that if educators are to truly do justice to ethics in the basic public speaking course, we need to go a step beyond the approach I outlined earlier. That approach was grounded in the assumption that ethics is one among many topics that need to be considered in the basic course. But, research, experience, and listening during the time that has passed since that article was published leads me to believe that this approach underrepresents the role of ethics in public speaking. Rather than embedding ethics into the course structure as a modular topic, I believe that instructors need to embed the other topics into an ethical framework to give ethics proper treatment in the course.

This change is not antithetical to the approach outlined in the previous article, but rather, focuses on a more fundamental issue that was not examined in that article. This article presents a perspective that is different than the one that was employed in the previous article, but one in which all the ideas from the previous article can comfortably be placed. So, instead of addressing how to add ethics as a topic that might have been otherwise missed, this article examines what the role of ethics should be in the course. In this article, I describe the "effectiveness" approach to public speaking instruction and discuss dangers of that approach, propose a reversal in perspective (an ethics-based approach), and I discuss how this change can be accomplished within the confines of the standard basic course. To help make these ideas more concrete, one basic course is reviewed as a possible example of how such an approach might be implemented.

PUBLIC SPEAKING AS TECHNIQUE

State of the art. Public speaking is frequently taught as a skills-based course with the primary goal of increasing students' effectiveness as speakers. This focus often guides both the approach textbook authors take in writing the texts (Hess & Pearson, 1992) and mainstream instruction in public speaking (e.g., Gibson, Hanna, & Leichty, 1991; Morreale, Hanna, Berko, & Gibson, 1999).[1] Educators often focus their discussion of the course on whether the skills taught in public speaking classes are the skills students will need when they take jobs after college (e.g., Johnson & Szczu-

pakiewicz, 1987; Wolvin & Corley, 1984; Sorenson & Pearson, 1980). In such discussions, the issue is what will make students effective in requisite tasks. The perception that public speaking is a class which primarily functions to help students with the mechanics of giving a speech is reflected in the fact that public speaking is often labeled as a "skills class." Reflecting not just on the introductory course, but the entire discipline, Jensen (1997) lamented, "We have excessively focused on achieving effectiveness — on convincing, converting skeptics, winning the debates — without balancing these aims with the ethical commitment" (p. 4).

When public speaking is taught with a focus on skills and effectiveness, the content is taught largely as technique, not as philosophy. The focus on technique means that public speaking is taught as a systematic procedure by which a task is accomplished, rather than as a body of knowledge in the sense of a liberal art. Students are taught which behaviors elicit which responses from listeners or lead to which perceptions among audience members. Successful speakers are then able to discern relevant variables that may inform which behavior choice will lead to the best result, and then perform the most effective behaviors. Such a model resembles the ideal of corporate training, where employees are taught how to master a certain skill, such as the use of a computer program or how to effectively handle a call from a dissatisfied customer (e.g., Rafaeli, 1989a, 1989b). Enriching the person's mind by developing a philosophy about that task is not a concern in such situations; instead, trainers are interested in enabling trainees to properly wield the tools of their trade in a way that functions most effectively for the organization.

The danger of technique. Teaching public speaking as technique may be useful in corporate settings, but the approach is not ideal in a college or university setting for three reasons. Of greatest importance among these reasons is that it is not an accurate representation of the subject matter being taught. As discussed later, public speaking is intrinsically a moral activity; almost every aspect of the process involves ethical questions that must be addressed. Partitioning the moral element into one module misrepresents the nature of the subject and makes it likely that the philosophical questions will go largely unexamined.

A second problem with teaching public speaking as technique is that it increases the possibility that students, no matter how well-intentioned, will use the techniques they learn to harmful ends. Arnett (1996) labeled the individual who has learned a set of skills but not the philosophy to guide their use a "technician of communication" (p. 341). His concern, derived from Jacques Ellul's warning about twentieth century mentality, is that a technician fails to comprehend the deeper and important questions guiding our behaviors. Such people are dangerous, even when trying to do good. Arnett illustrated what can happen when people practice technique without adequate philosophical understanding through the following examples: "Carl Rogers confided that he was pleased to be a Rogers instead of a Rogerian therapist. Can one imagine Karl Marx's contempt for the bloated and corrupt bureaucracy of the former Soviet Union, as that dream failed from the overconfidence of a system led by technicians?" (p. 343).

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A third limitation of teaching public speaking as technique is that it leaves the class vulnerable to the criticism that it is not worthy of a place in higher education; this criticism may be politically damaging to departments and the discipline. In general, communication departments have less credibility and influence across the academy than many of the longer-established departments in the social sciences and humanities such as psychology, sociology, and English. All departments compete for increasingly scarce resources, making it vital for any department's well-being that it not be seen as weak or unimportant. Yet, our discipline has been criticized for being both of those. Perhaps the best-known and most broadly sweeping attack of this sort was Alan Fischler's (1989) scathing indictment of the communication discipline in an essay published as an point of view essay in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* a decade ago. In this essay, Fischler suggested that discipline's subject matter is trivial and that it makes no significant contribution to the academy. Although communication scholars argued that these criticisms were unjust (e.g., Osborn, 1990), bad press like this essay is harmful to our discipline. To increase academic credibility, we must impress our colleagues that our research and teaching make a significant contribution to theory and to students' experience.

Public speaking is currently taught in many high schools. The ideas presented in most college-level textbooks are not only written near high-school levels (Schneider, 1991), the ideas presented in the typical text (Hess & Pearson, 1992) are no more intellectually sophisticated than what high school seniors can master. The fundamental skills taught are not particularly diffi-

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cult — everyone practices them on a daily basis. Thus, it is easy for students and colleagues to see public speaking as a class more suited to high school than college. It is not surprising that by some accounts students see the basic course primarily as busywork (Weaver & Cotrell, 1992). What gives public speaking the capacity to contribute to the college experience is not so much the chance to practice the techniques in a formal setting, but rather, the chance to learn and understand the philosophy driving the application of these techniques, and the ideas that can inform students why people should make certain choices.

Situating public speaking as an form of applied ethics instead of a skills class does not exactly solve all political problems. After all, our discipline wishes no more for its basic course to be seen as a branch of the philosophy department than as a training ground for remedial skills. But, by helping students develop deeper understanding of the topic than just basic techniques, the course does enter the conversation about its own worthiness from a stronger position.[2] Our discipline's place in the academy is part of an ongoing discourse throughout higher education, and the enrichment of the basic course's foundations might be one way to enhance the contributions we can claim.

If we wish to most accurately portray the essence of public speaking in our classes, the technique-driven approach is insufficient. If we hold true to the liberal arts mission of higher education — helping enrich students' minds — then instructing students what technique to apply under which circumstances fails to deliver. If we want to establish credibility for the course and our discipline, such an approach is not the way to earn it. The

foregoing points are not intended to devalue skills or argue that public speaking should become a course on philosophy. Skills *are* important, but they serve humanity best when they follow as praxis from a deeper understanding of guiding philosophies. This article is not a call to abandon skills, but rather, a call to enhance them through enriched grounding.

ETHICS AS A FOUNDATION FOR PUBLIC SPEAKING

The contention that the basic public speaking course should be taught from an ethical perspective is likely to raise some questions. Because it is the central theme in this article, a more careful examination of the arguments behind it is necessary. This claim is based on concerns for subject accuracy, responsible use of power, the mission of liberal arts education, and meeting student needs.

Subject accuracy. Perhaps the most compelling reason to teach public speaking from an ethical perspective is that it is more accurate to the subject than the effectiveness approach. Public speaking is a moral activity, so teaching it as amoral inaccurately portrays the nature of the act.

When differentiating moral from amoral situations, ethicists typically apply two criteria: choice and effect (Bormann, 1981; Johannesen; 1990; Nilsen, 1966). If a person's action is not voluntarily chosen, then it is not usually considered to fall within the realm of morality (thus the common vernacular, "moral choice"). Kant, for instance, believed that ethics did not apply to animals

because they lack the ability to reason, and thus, they cannot make ethical choices (Rachels, 1999). In the eyes of most philosophers, it makes no sense to judge someone morally on something that the person had no control over. As Bormann (1981) wrote, "The inevitable is not ethical. We ought not hold people responsible for communication over which they had no control" (p.269). There are, however, many choices people make that are not moral issues. For example, the choice of which outfit to wear on a given day is not a moral choice, but rather a practical one. Moral issues arise only when the choices people make have some impact on the world around them. Wearing a particular article of clothing could become a moral choice if it has a symbolic meaning that others would recognize or if it violates a dress code at work. In those cases, the action's effect on others transforms the choice from amoral to moral.

Applying the criteria of choice and effect to public speaking suggests that public speaking is inherently a moral undertaking. At every step of speech preparation and delivery, speakers make choices. These choices range from how much research to do, what material to include or exclude, whether or not to reveal affiliations with interest groups, or whether to use certain emotional appeals or delivery styles. All of these choices impact other people. With public speaking, the impact is multiplied by the number of people involved. While interpersonal or small group contexts involve no more than a handful of people, speeches are commonly delivered to twenty-five or more listeners, and audiences numbering hundreds or thousands are not unusual. It is not surprising that many early thinkers considered speech and ethics to be part of the same subject (Arnett,

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1990). For example, Aristotle viewed public speaking as a practical philosophy, and concerned himself with what constituted virtue in such a philosophy (Aristotle, antiquity/1932, antiquity/1962). To the founders of our discipline, public speaking was as much (if not more) about moral issues as it was about effectiveness.

To argue that public speaking is inherently a moral activity is not to say that *everything* a speaker does has moral value. There are many choices that speakers make which are not moral choices. However, the combined effect of all a speaker's choices is moral in nature, as are many of the individual choices along the way. Speakers need to have enough awareness of ethical issues that they can identify where these ethical decision points lie.

Responsible Use of Power. It can be easy to overlook how powerful of an act public speaking is. Yet one only has to think of the effect public speaking has had in history to realize it is a potent force in human society. If the pen is mightier than the sword, the voice is equally mighty. Just in the last century, the speeches of Adolf Hitler, Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, and Boris Yeltzin have influenced social and political history; on a more mundane level, many people have been inspired to action by popular speakers like Anthony Robbins and Stephen Covey.

Given the ability public speaking has to affect many people's lives, it is irresponsible to teach the skill without careful attention to proper use. Speeches can be used for the betterment of society, or they may be harmful to many people, even those who are not in the listening audience. Teaching students to be more effective in their speaking without any attention to the common

good runs the risk of contributing to some of society's ills. If forced to choose, it would be better for educators to train students who understand the role of their public speaking in the common good and work toward that end despite mediocre content and delivery skills, than to produce speakers who are narcissistic manipulators with refined, polished, and influential speaking style.

Teaching public speaking from the perspective of effectiveness is dangerous not just because of the insufficient attention to ethical questions, but also because of the implication that ethics simply are not relevant. Johnson (1970) expressed concern that ethics be given more attention in public speaking classes because the most immoral speaker may not be the person who makes bad decisions, but rather, the one who fails to even consider the moral issues at hand. Todd-Mancillas (1987) wrote, "One of my greatest concerns is that we may well be helping an entire generation of students to presume the unimportance of asking fundamentally important questions about the rightness or wrongness of given communication strategies" (p. 12). Even if we fail to help students fully achieve the level of ethical understanding they need for public speaking, we at least need to help students shape the understanding that ethical concerns are a central component of public speaking. This understanding does not come from talking about ethics on a single occasion, but rather, from making it the perspective from which the material is addressed.

Mission of liberal arts education. Liberal arts institutions are often contrasted with technical schools, whose functions is to teach students the skills of a trade so that they can work in that selected career. It is the mission of the liberal arts university to develop students

minds and help them seek the good life. The goal of education is to help students learn how to think and to be able to provide intellectual leadership in their jobs and in society, not just to apprentice a craft (Arnett, 1992; Bloom, 1987; McMillan & Cheney, 1996; Schneider, 1998). For the mission of shaping students' minds rather than teaching a trade, focusing not on the skills for their own sake, but on the skills as the embodiment of philosophical stances, an ethically-guided approach to public speaking is more appropriate.

Student needs. In the past, moral philosophy was often the grand finale of a student's college experience. Bellah et al. (1985) noted that when American higher education was being formed, moral philosophy was what would be called a capstone class in today's vernacular — it integrated all their other course of study. Such is not the case in our current educational system. Many of today's college students take only one class on ethics, and some take none at all. Thus, it is safe to say that many students will not bring sophisticated ethical knowledge into their public speaking class, and they may not develop a sophisticated understanding of ethical issues pertaining to speech after they leave the class. Certainly there are many opportunities across the academy for students to develop ethical awareness and bring it into the public speaking class, but not all students will have taken advantage of those. So, if students are to develop their ethical expertise on speech-related topics, their time spent in the public speaking class may be essential.

The combination of these factors — accuracy, responsible use of power, the mission of liberal arts, and student needs — provides support for the idea of

teaching public speaking from an ethical perspective. The following section discusses how such an approach can be implemented in the classroom.

IMPLEMENTATION

Teaching public speaking from an ethical perspective poses several challenges for the classroom instructor. The basic public speaking course is highly standardized across our discipline, a fact reflected in both surveys (e.g., Gibson, Hanna, & Leichty, 1991; Morreale, Hanna, Berko, & Gibson, 1999) and in the texts themselves (Hess & Pearson, 1992). Many of the same topics are covered across classes (even if the proportion of the class devoted to it varies) and textbooks share remarkable similarity in both contents and approach. Many departments prescribe constraints for their basic course (whether it is faculty or teaching assistant-taught) to ensure consistency across sections. How then is an instructor to implement such a change?

The reversal in perspective, while significant in implication, can be carried out without need for wholesale reconstruction of the course. Implementing this philosophy requires not a change in topics covered, but rather, a change in the way the topics are approached. In 1998, the University of Missouri-Columbia restructured its basic course (Communication 75) to try to meet the objectives outlined in this paper. This section of this paper examines the basic format and instruction of Communication 75 as one example of how a course might be tailored to fit into an ethical framework.

Philosophy statement

The University of Missouri-Columbia offers ap-
proximately 33 sections of Communication 75 each se-
mester. These classes share a common syllabus and
text, as well as assignments and exams, but are taught
independently by approximately 18 graduate teaching
assistants (GTAs) each semester. The course is offered
in three variations: regular sections, honors sections,
and some sections dedicated to students majoring in
business and public administration (B&PA). Honors sec-
tions assignments are the same as in regular sections,
except for the first speech. The additional challenge in
the honors version comes not from differences in topics,
focus, or assignments, but through higher expectations
and some more challenging variations on the regular
assignments.[3] The B&PA version uses the same sylla-
bus, text, and exams as the other sections, but the
speech assignments are tailored to public speaking in a
business setting. Classroom activities (lecture, discus-
sion, activities) are also focused on public speaking in
organizational contexts rather than broader social con-
texts.

Before they arrive on campus, the GTAs are given a
brief statement of the course philosophy to help them
focus on an ethics-informed approach (see Appendix).
This philosophy statement, also available to students on
the course web page, outlines the course's focus on "3Es"
of ethics, effectiveness, and enjoyment, with the order of
listing indicating priority. In brief, it states that class's
mission of helping students develop a conception of
public speaking as an ethical activity, and within that

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context considering issues of effectiveness. The last focus, enjoyment, is subordinate to the previous concerns, and simply suggests that public speaking can be an enjoyable activity, and it is desirable for instructors to help students start to enjoy giving speeches.

GTAs are given this philosophy statement in an *Instructor's Resource Manual* created by the course director, and it is discussed in detail during fall orientation for all instructors. The philosophy is applied across all versions of the course. Even though the B&PA sections concentrate on public speaking in organizational settings instructors still try to help students see it first and foremost as a moral undertaking. Additionally, during the fall workshop, GTAs attend workshops on ethics in public speaking to increase their own knowledge of the subject. However, the course does not hold the philosophy that instructors need to begin their careers with extensive background in ethics. As long as they have a minimal level of competence, they can explore along with the students. The goal of the course is not as much to discover the final answer to all the questions (indeed, such an approach could be counterproductive), but to begin the process of discovery. So, if instructors have enough background to make an informed approach to the issues, they can further their own understanding as they teach the course.

Implementation in Lecture and Activities

Class instructors are encouraged to view the topics in the text from the perspective of the course philosophy statement. This can be facilitated by numerous texts which include an early chapter on ethics in public

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speaking, a dramatic change from the page or two on ethics that was the norm in the early nineties (Hess, 1992). Instructors use the chapter on ethics as a platform from which the fundamentals can be introduced. This may entail emphasizing the role of ethics in public speaking, some useful theories of ethics, and a discussion of free speech. This introduction is designed to emphasize the role ethics plays in public speaking and provide the fundamentals that can be developed as the semester proceeds.

Identifying significant issues. After the ethics chapter, most textbooks have adequate coverage of how students can be more effective with their speaking, but contain minimal reference to ethical issues. So, instructors are asked to examine the moral dimensions of the various aspects of speech preparation and delivery in their lectures and activities. To illustrate some ethical issues instructors might address in class lecture, discussion, and activities, seven common topics are reviewed.

1. Topic selection and purpose of speech. One important ethical issue in this domain is the importance of the speech being given for the common good. The choices of what to talk about and how to approach the topic need to be driven not just by the speaker's self-interest, but by consideration of what is in the audience member's best interest.

2. Audience analysis and adaptation. Although there are numerous ethical issues pertaining to audience analysis and adaptation, one of the most interesting ones is adapting with integrity. Integrity refers to the act of discerning moral values and then adhering to them, even at personal risk (Carter, 1996). Audience

adaptation, the process of learning about audience characteristics and then making changes to suit that audience, is a process that might be at odds with speaker integrity. How can a speaker adapt both speech content and personal presentation without compromising integrity? What adaptations are acceptable, and under what conditions?

One Communication 75 instructor asks students to respond to the following case. It is designed to help students think about the issue of adapting with integrity, and begin to make their own judgments about what constitutes morally acceptable adaptation: "William Fulbright (of the Fulbright Scholarship) was an influential senator from Arkansas. He impressed members of Congress with his command of the English language. However, when Fulbright returned to Arkansas to speak with his constituents, mostly farmers, he would wear jeans and a flannel shirt and talk with a southern accent. How do you rate the ethical quality of his communication? Why do you rate it that way? Can he speak differently in Washington, D.C. and in rural Arkansas?" In answering this question, students must grapple with adaptations in both content and style, and determine what adaptations maintain integrity and what adaptations violate it.

3. Presentational aids. The ethical questions associated with presentational aids are many and varied. Most of the questions are specific to the presentational aid in question, or the way in which it is being used. It is often more difficult with presentational aids for students to comprehend the many ethical questions that

must be asked. Sometimes, it takes some examples to help them start thinking about the moral dimension.

As an example, consider the well-known 1968 photograph of Saigon police chief Nguyen Ngoc Loan summarily executing a Viet Cong suspect during the Tet offensive. Nguyen is shown holding a gun to the head of the suspect, who is displaying a horribly anguished look on his face, knowing that he is just seconds from death. This photograph has been widely reproduced, even in communication textbooks (e.g., Burgoon, Buller, & Woodall, 1989). Although there is no blood in the photograph, the victim's facial expression and the horror of the situation is enough to cause a strong negative emotional reaction in a sizeable portion of people who view the picture. Under what circumstances should this photograph be shown as a presentational aid? The emotional distraction obviously poses a possible threat to the effectiveness of a speech, but what about the ethical implications? Such a photograph may be offensive to one or more audience members. What topics, purposes, or situations justify such a graphic depiction? Should audience members be warned not to look if they think that viewing this image will be disturbing? Does the availability of alternative presentational aids make this picture more or less morally acceptable? Does the placement of this picture within the speech (at the beginning, middle, or end) make a difference? What if the picture is at the end and distracts students from the speech to follow? All of these are relevant ethical questions that students should ask when making choices about presentational aids. Those questions merely address the content of one photograph. There are an infinite array of

other questions about presentational aids, covering both what is displayed and how it is used, that students must consider when making choices about aids so that their use of the visual channel is both effective and morally acceptable.

4. Conducting research. A tension exists between our country's belief in freedom of speech and the need for speakers to be well-versed on a subject. Overemphasizing the need for speaker expertise can repress challenges to authority and violates the First Amendment right to speak on any topic, but underemphasizing the need for speaker expertise can waste audience members time with inaccurate or obviously misguided commentary. Schwartzman (1987) suggests that speakers need to be competent, but not expert. This solution is sensible, but it can be difficult for students to operationalize. What criteria makes a person competent in an area? How do students know how much research they need to do to become competent, and how much, if any, do they have the right to expect from a speaker? Jensen (1997) suggests that freedom of expression is best judged by balancing both rights and responsibilities. Again, the values are easy to identify but difficult to determine. What responsibilities do people hold with regard to expertise? What are both the speaker's rights and the rights of the larger community?

5. Supporting material. It has long been said that "figures can't lie, but liars can figure" in reference to the fact that statistics can be manipulated to support almost any claim (e.g., Huff, 1954/1993). Textbooks do a good job telling students how to do research and make

their case using support materials to back up their claims, but what are the ethical questions? Many questions that texts raise under the heading of proper form are questions of both effectiveness and ethics. For instance, is an example typical or atypical? Presenting an atypical example as if it is typical leaves a speaker open to refutation (thus losing effectiveness) but it is also an act of low ethical quality. Likewise, ethical issues regarding support material can include quoting out of context, misleading with statistics, presenting hypothetical examples as real, choosing what information to omit from a speech, and more. A couple of the major ethical themes regarding support material are the fidelity of the information presented and the way this information affects the audience (Jensen, 1997).

6. Wording. Language choice is another significant point of ethical decision-making (Jensen, 1997). The use of a "trigger word" (a term that sparks an emotional reaction, such as "family values," or "pro-life") provides a good example. What ethical guidelines should constrain speaker's use of trigger words? Or, are any reactions the responsibility of audience members, who must control their feelings as part of proper listening? The question of responsibility is brought to life in a form that students can identify with by Michael J. Fox, whose character in the movie *Back to the Future* can always be emotionally manipulated by through the use of a derogatory trigger word.

Another significant issue with language is its lack of neutrality. Every term has connotations that bias it in some way. The difference between calling a person an

"anti-abortionist" instead of a "pro-lifer" are vast, despite the fact that both terms refer to someone who opposes abortion. What term should a person use for the military? "Military" implies a warlike organization more than does the term "service," which suggests many of its civilian functions. Calling it the "defense" conjures something different than going to foreign soil and attacking enemy troops, which connotatively seems more like "offense." In both of these examples, terms describing the military or people who oppose abortion, there is no word which describes the referent without introducing some type of bias. The speaker *cannot* describe such a subject with complete neutrality. It was his recognition of the fact that language conveys attitudes which led Mehrabian (1966) to study immediacy, construct which has spawned an extensive line of research by communication scholars on its impact in the classroom (e.g., Christensen & Menzel, 1998; Gorham, 1988). Speakers need to be aware of the implications of their language choice in shaping listener perceptions or fostering listener reactions.

7. Persuasion. Perhaps nowhere are ethics more important than in persuasion. It is the purpose of a persuasive speaker to have some effect on the listener, that is, to change her or him in some way. Such an intrusion into others' lives carries a significant ethical responsibility. Philosophers have written much about the ethics of persuasion, with stances ranging from persuasion as an act of care to persuasion as an act of violence (e.g., Brockreide, 1972; Johannesen, 1990, Nilsen, 1966). It is most important for public speaking teachers to help students understand the importance of this responsibility. Questions of one- versus two-sided

approaches to persuasion are often presented as effectiveness questions, but often have stronger implications in ethics than efficacy. Can students differentiate persuasion from coercion, manipulation, and brainwashing? What should speakers do about information they discover during their research that is counter to their perspective? What degree of responsibility do speakers bear for audience perceptions, and what degree of responsibility do audiences hold for being insightful as to possible flaws in the speaker's argument (as in "buyer beware")? These are just a few of the many ethical issues inherent in persuasion.

Dialogue in community. Once an ethical question has been identified by the instructor or students, the challenge is how to best engage in dialogue on the subject. Addressing these questions requires coming to terms with two issues. First, educators must face the question of how much value judgment they offer. Few educators deem it appropriate to force their values upon students, yet the alternative of providing little or no value guidance seems equally unpalatable. One approach is to encourage students to come to their own value judgments, but for the instructor to require that they be able to articulate and critically evaluate reasons for those judgments. Barnes (1982) noted, "If values are not arbitrary, there must be reasons for them" (p. 8), and it is this set of underlying reasons that students need to comprehend.

Second, educators must consider the question of whether values are universal or whether they are individually- or culturally-determined. This issue is important because the educators' own views on whether

the conversation over values is moving toward uncovering a universal truth or toward each student finding their own independent truths will affect the ways in which the teacher influences the conversation in class. Scholars are not in agreement on this topic. Some theorists (e.g., Kidder, 1994; Rachels, 1999) suggest the promise of universal values, but others (e.g., Pointer & Young, 1997) express skepticism. Post-modern perspectives typically reject the notion of a single hegemonic metanarrative, instead favoring the co-existence of many guiding narratives (e.g., Arnett & Arneson, 1999).

Regardless of whether future ethical theory settles on a set of universal values or suggests the impossibility of their existence, the present reality is that there is no consensus among scholars on a set of universally accepted values and standards. Thus, dialogue among students, who form the community in which the speeches exist, is the central ingredient to addressing ethical issues. Barnes (1982) argues for the centrality of dialogue in examining values, by noting that the refusal to engage in dialogue about value with others fails to take the other's values seriously. For Barnes, values are neither individual nor social, but emerge when dialogue takes place among members of a community. It is in dialogue that moments of understanding take place and common meanings emerge (Cissna & Anderson, 1998). When educators address the moral face of public speaking, they must help the class grapple with issues for which they may not find easy answers and may not derive consensus. Although I have suggested some sample questions on different topics, it is the fact that there can be no easy list of ethical issues to address or ways to

respond which makes a "technician's" approach (Arnett, 1996) to the topic nonviable. Those samples were designed to stimulate thinking or begin a discussion, but they can only be a starting point, not a final destination.

In order for dialogue to flourish in a classroom setting, the class (led by the instructor) needs to be sensitive to different viewpoints in the class and foster comfort with that diversity. Makau (1997, 1998) suggests that mutual respect and equality, and ability to listen well are foundational for dialogue to occur. However, if dialogue truly takes place, she warns that students will test their ideas in ways they have not tried before, and that process may sometimes be uncomfortable. Such discomfort raises both philosophical and pedagogical issues. It is desirable because no enduring growth and change can take place without some degree (occasionally considerable) of discomfort. But, such discomfort can also create difficulties for instructors. It may express itself as hostility among class members, sometimes overt, and it may create stress and other problems from students. Addressing the manner in which class dialogue should unfold is one task of the classroom instructor, but dealing with hurt feelings or ripple effects of the class's ideas on a student's personal life may cross the boundaries of a teacher's role and responsibilities (Peterson, 1992). So, addressing questions of how much discomfort is created and how to best handle it (if at all) pose many questions not easily answered.

Implementation in Assignments

Communication 75 is designed so that the attention to ethics comes not from assignments *about* ethics, but

from attention to ethical dimensions of assignments that do not overtly focus on ethics. This is because the approach is to encourage students to view any given topic through an ethical lens, and to realize that ethics are inherent in any speech undertaking. The course includes four major speeches: a demonstration speech, an analysis speech, a group presentation, and a persuasive speech, in that order. Only in the persuasive speech are students required to explicitly address ethics as part of the assignment. For the other assignments, it is the responsibility of the course instructor to help students discern — through lecture, discussion, and class activities — the ethical issues that are inherent in the work.

The attention to ethics in the persuasive speech is not found in the spoken presentation itself, but rather, in an accompanying report. The persuasive speech is the final assignment, and thus the longest, best developed speech a student gives. To help students make this speech their capstone project for the semester and so that students must demonstrate knowledge of how and why they made their choices, they are required to write a strategy report while developing this speech. This paper is graded and returned to students before they give the speech, giving them time to make improvements based on feedback from the instructor.

In the persuasive speech assignment, students are reminded that "Your goal in persuasive speaking is that audience members, with full knowledge of all relevant information, voluntarily choose the perception or behavior you advocate." The strategy report asks students to consider two ethical questions. First, they are asked to evaluate the ethical quality of their speech's purpose.

Answering this question requires both an awareness of what ethical decisions they made in regard to their topic selection, but also an ability to defend their choice with good reasons. Second, they are asked to evaluate the ethical quality of the strategies they will use to accomplish their objectives. This question requires that students identify the ethical nature of a variety of decision-points they face in preparing the speech and trying to accomplish their objectives, and, as before, explain their choices with good reasons. For both of the questions, students must be able to demonstrate compliance with the aforementioned goal statement. In so doing, it is the intention of the assignment to encourage students to place their focus on the ethical questions they face as they work on matters of effectiveness.

Critique

The description of Communication 75 was included in this article to illustrate how an abstract rationale (ethical perspective) could be translated into course content. Still, it is natural to ask whether this course design has been effective in accomplishing its goals. A few remarks on this issue are in order, although they are kept brief because the purpose of the article is to develop a vision, not to evaluate the effectiveness of a particular course. The remarks here simply address the question of how well this course seems to have fulfilled that vision and where it could do better.

Because Communication 75's change in philosophy was accompanied by changes in text and assignments, no empirical data could be collected that would determine whether the new perspective was responsible for

changing outcomes. Beside, many of these changes have more to do with long-term perceptual and behavior changes than specific outcomes during the semester. Anecdotal evidence does suggest that the change in philosophy has had at least some of the intended effect. Interviews with instructors who have taught the course under both the effectiveness- and the ethics-based models suggest that the revisions have helped students make strides in the direction of increased awareness of ethical issues and responsibility, and that speeches seem to be more ethically responsible. On the other hand, it is not clear the degree to which students fully understand and appreciate the role ethics plays in public speaking. So, there is undoubtedly room for progress.

How might the implementation be improved? Supplemental readings on ethics and public speaking might further develop students' understanding in this area. Such readings could either be articles about ethics, such as chapters from ethics texts or books like Jensen (1997) or Jaksa and Pritchard (1994), articles about ethical controversies that might serve as discussion stimuli (e.g., Alter, 1995), or writings that draw on ethical principles and require the reader to examine the moral values when examining the work. For example, Troup (1999) reported that basic course students at Duquesne University read Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* as a way of examining philosophical issues pertaining to public speaking. This extra attention might further students' awareness of ethical dimensions and depth of thought on the topic.

CONCLUSION

Approaching the introductory public speaking course from an ethical perspective does not require abandoning the standard course format or making a radical departure from what had been taught before. What it requires is a change in the *perspective* from which the same topics are covered. When instructors change approach the class from a different standpoint, changes in lecture, discussion, and activities will naturally follow. Instructors need not be experts in ethics to start implementing these changes; they can learn and develop along with the students. Students sometimes find it empowering to know that the instructor does not have every answer and is accompanying them on a journey of discovery. Although it may take instructors some time and effort to rethink their course in this manner, making this change can pay dividends in better representation of the subject matter, better fulfilling the mission of the university, strengthening the credibility of the course, and — most important — contributing to better social leaders.

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ENDNOTES

[1] By skills-based, I refer to courses that focus on the mechanics of giving a speech--how to learn about an audience, what factors are part of a polished delivery style, how to use emotional appeals, etc. The characterization of the basic course as commonly being skill-based, comes from two major sources noted in the article. First, content analyses of textbooks by Hess and Pearson (1992) and Hess (1992) suggest that introductory public speaking texts focus most heavily on the essentials of effective content and delivery. Further, these analyses reveal that ethics receive comparatively little attention in texts, although it should be noted that today's texts seem to devote considerably more attention to ethics than their early-nineties editions did. Second, regular surveys of the basic course (e.g., Gibson, Hanna, & Huddleston, 1985; Gibson, Hanna, & Leichty, 1991; Morreale, Hanna, Berko, & Gibson, 1999) reveal that topics such as informative and persuasive speaking, audience analysis, delivery, outlining, and listening are reported as most commonly receiving the most attention in class. Although this finding does not serve as indisputable proof that ethics is not a major focus in many classes, the omission of ethics from reports of topics receiving class time prompted Gibson, Hanna, and Huddleston (1985) to comment that its conspicuous absence. They noted that its omission "...provide[s] interesting, if not puzzling, questions about instructional priorities" (p. 287).

[2] It would be difficult for any change in the course to lead to the perception of public speaking as a course in applied ethics, because the skill component of the course is too essential. Adopting an ethical perspective provides a richer perspective, but it is still a perspective about a certain skill.

[3] For example, in the honors sections students are required to match topics with another speaker on the persuasive speech so that someone else will give an opposing perspective on the same topic. This requirement not only motivates students to prepare their speeches more thoroughly, but it also eliminates "easy speeches" on topics that have no real opposition (e.g., wear a seatbelt, do not drive drunk, practice safe sex, etc.).

APPENDIX

Philosophy Statement for Communication 75

In Communication 75, we want to offer the highest quality introduction to public speaking possible. It is our belief that a combination of textbook readings, speaking practice, and analytic/critical reflection exercises give students the best opportunity to make progress towards improving their knowledge and skills in public speaking.

Just as a speech must be guided by a sense of purpose, so too must our class. This purpose addresses three basic questions: (1) Why do we set the course up this way? (2) What should the substance of the course be? (3) How do we translate these ideas into action? In our class, this purpose is as follows:

We want our students to develop excellence as both producers and consumers of public speaking. This excellence is defined by three characteristics: ethics, effectiveness, and enjoyment. Students are best served in Communication 75 by pursuing excellence through an incremental approach and by developing good habits.

Objective: Excellence as both produce and consumer

Many public speaking classes are designed to teach students to be good speakers. This is indeed a necessary

component of a public speaking course, but it is by itself insufficient. Our mission at the university is to produce competent citizens capable of governing themselves in a democratic manner. Because public speaking is so central to the process of governance, it is one of the most vital elements of a publicly-subsidized education. However, as responsible citizens in a free society, we must be first and foremost capable consumers of such rhetoric. We need to listen to political statements and other available information and then enact appropriate responses, whether that is communicating with legislators, voting, or taking some other action. Without a sufficient population of people with such skills, a democratic society cannot survive. It is our mission in the public speaking classroom to help instill a sense of this responsibility on students and help them develop the skills necessary for them to do this.

Pursuing excellence as a producer of public speeches involves all the usual elements -- audience analysis and adaptation, appropriate ethical knowledge, research skills, organization, delivery, etc. Pursuing excellence as a consumer of public speeches entails good listening skills, critical thinking, evaluation of content and sources, ability to respond in appropriate manner, and other related skills.

Focus: 3e's of excellence

Helping students achieve excellence in public speaking requires them to master three elements: speaking ethically, speaking effectively, and enjoying public speaking (the order of listing is not accidental). An explanation of each follows:

Ethical Foundation for the Basic Course

Ethics. Ethicists typically differentiate a moral question (e.g., "Should I lie to my teacher?") from an amoral question (e.g., "Should I eat my french fries before my hamburger, or should I eat them together?") based on several factors, most notably choice and effect. If the issue affects at least one other person and if the actor has a choice in the matter it is typically considered to be a moral question. Public speaking, by its nature, effects many people, and speakers have a range of choice about how to prepare and deliver their speeches. Thus, ethical issues are at the forefront of all aspects of public speaking.

But ethics are more central to public speaking than just the fact that a speech is a morally- charged entity. Ron Arnett, in a complex and intriguing argument (Arnett, 1990) argues that communication ethics is the foundation of our discipline. Communication ethics, he notes, is a practical philosophy (characterized by a concern for the common good, emphasis on practicing virtuous behaviors, and worked out in specific contexts). This philosophy should guide all that we do as communicators, serving as the guideline for our choices and actions. It is this foundation in practical philosophy that protects against the danger of overemphasis on technique, or from over-reliance on style and image.

Ethics are often seen merely as rules that restrict our choices of behavior. Nothing could be further from the truth of ethics' nature. Ethics are the ideals that allow human social organizations to exist. Shames (1989) uses the analogy of a baseball game: without the rule that you must hit the ball within the foul lines a batter would have a greater range of options in any given at-bat. But without such rules, the game could not

exist. So the rules governing the game function to make the game possible more than restricting choices.

It is of the highest importance that we help students to see the moral dimensions to all that they do as a public speaker (and how ethics make it possible for the public speaking situation to exist in the first place), help them understand how their choices should first stem from underlying philosophies of right and wrong, and steer them to ask "What should I do?" instead of "What can I do?" This is the essence of public speaking that functions for the common good, not just for the narcissistic pursuit of self-gain. We would do a far better service to produce students who are mediocre speakers and listeners but who focus their efforts on the common good, than to produce students who are highly effective speakers and listeners, but who use their skills to be manipulators of others as they pursue their own selfish agenda.

Effectiveness. Within the domain of ethical speech, the most important issue is effectiveness--how can speakers and listeners use their skills to achieve their desired ends. All the traditional elements of a public speaking course are designed to help students increase effectiveness. The central issue here is cause and effect: if a speaker or listener does a certain behavior, what effect will it have? Is that the best way to achieve the goal?

Enjoyment. While rarely discussed in a public speaking class, this element should never be left out. Giving a really good speech is a very enjoyable experience. Audience members are attentive, excited, and generate their own enthusiasm for the topic that pervades room and dominates the atmosphere. Even after

the speech is over it lives on in the audience members and has some effect on their lives, often even on the lives of people who weren't there.

Not only is enjoyment the byproduct of a good speech, it is also a component of one. Not much is worse than watching a speaker who clearly wants nothing more than for the speech to be over. When a speaker enjoys the address, however, that feeling of enthusiasm makes the audience's experience significantly better as well. We need to be constantly working at helping students see how fun giving a speech can be and to feeling comfortable enough giving a speech that they begin to enjoy it and even look forward to giving future speeches.

Implementation: Incremental method and developing habits

Two basic principles guide our method of teaching public speaking. First, students should learn the material incrementally. Second, while students won't master everything in one semester, it is important that they develop the right habits.

Incremental method. The incremental method is based on the notion that students cannot learn everything at once and that skill development is a process that doesn't happen instantly. The course is set up to help students master portions at a time. This is reflected in several aspects of the course. First, the material (in readings, lecture, and class activity) is broken into several segments, each of which is followed by a speech that emphasizes those skills. As students proceed, the skills build on each other. The focus for each speech includes all the skills from the previous ones

plus a new emphasis. Second, the length of speeches increases as the course progresses. This is designed not only to encourage students to develop more substantial speeches but is also necessitated by the increasing expectations. The final speech is the longest and it gives students the opportunity to wrap the class up with one final masterpiece.

As an instructor, you want to focus on helping students master the new material and on relating that material to what they've already learned. When grading speeches, you should only judge them on the topics covered to that point in the semester.

Developing habits. While it is unreasonable to expect students to become polished speakers in one class, it is quite reasonable to help them develop the right habits. These habits will enable them to continue to improve and refine their speaking skills as they continue to give speeches beyond the classroom. Policies you make about use of presentational aids, amount of notes, what outlines should look like, or anything else should be designed to push students to develop the habits that will serve them well in future speaking.