Using Computer-Assisted Supervision in Counsellor Education Programs

Ron Lehr
Acadia University

ABSTRACT

The current article uses information obtained from teaching practices to conceptualize how computers might be used to enhance the supervision of graduate counselling students (herein called beginning counsellors). Using Hill and O'Grady's (1985) list of counsellor intentions, the author devised a computer program called *Counsellor Assisted Supervision* that allows beginning counsellors to monitor and evaluate counselling video tapes. The article provides a description of the computer program, how it can be used in the supervision of beginning counsellors, and its value for use in counsellor education programs. Recommendations for supervisory practices are provided.

RÉSUMÉ

Le présent article utilise l'information obtenue des pratiques d'enseignement afin de conceptualiser la manière selon laquelle les ordinateurs pourraient être employés pour améliorer la surveillance des étudiants de maîtrise en counselling (appelés ci-après conseillers débutants). Utilisant la liste des intentions du conseiller de Hill et O'Grady (1985), l'auteur a conçu un programme d'ordinateur appelé « Supervision assistée du conseiller » (SAC) qui permet aux conseillers débutants de contrôler et d'évaluer des cassettes vidéos sur le counselling. L'article fournit une description du programme d'ordinateur, de la façon dont on peut l'utiliser pour la surveillance des conseillers débutants et de sa valeur pour utilisation dans les programmes de conseiller en éducation. Des recommandations sont fournies pour des pratiques de supervision.

As we enter into the new millennium, computers and computer technology are changing the way we view the world and education. In addition to the Internet and the proliferation of accessible information, educational institutions use computers and computer technology to change how courses are taught and delivered. In professional counselling programs, counsellor educators are also using computer technology in new and innovative ways. With the advent of digital photography and video streaming on computers, counsellor educators now have new tools with which they can supervise beginning counsellors. As a result of this new technology, counsellor supervision is rapidly undergoing significant changes.

This article describes how computer technology might be helpful in the supervision of graduate counselling students (hereinafter called beginning counsellors). Over the past few years, I devised a computer software program, called *Computer Assisted Supervision* (CAS), which supplements beginning counsellors' supervision sessions with the goal of enabling them to focus on their intentional counselling practices, self-reflection, and self-monitoring. Based upon the foundational work of Hill and O'Grady (1985), this software allows counsellor

educators to focus upon beginning counsellors' intentions during their counselling supervision sessions, and improve their understanding of beginning counsellors' motivations and self-confidence as they, in turn, reflect upon their own understanding of their counselling intentions. The creation and refinement of CAS as a tool that might enhance the quality of beginning counsellors' supervision resulted from information obtained from graduate students who were enrolled in their initial counselling practicum courses. These students used CAS during its initial development, and provided feedback on their personal experiences of its use in their individual supervisory sessions. Information gathered from these counselling students contributed to the creation of the current prototype.

This article describes CAS and how it might be used to supplement the supervision of beginning counsellors. I begin with a description of CAS, then provide an overview of the model of counsellor intentions that was used in the development of CAS, report how beginning counsellors can utilize CAS for self-reflection and for supervision, and describe the value of CAS for supervision within counsellor education programs.

COUNSELLOR-ASSISTED SUPERVISION AND COUNSELLOR INTENTIONS

What is CAS?

Computer technology has gained increasing recognition for the variety of ways in which it has been used in the field of counselling and in the supervision of students in counselling programs. For example, Graf and Stebnicki (2002) explored the effectiveness of e-mail as a primary supervisory technique in the counselling practicum. Newman and Abney (2004) examined the usefulness of combining digital video editing software and supervisor feedback as an alternative to the traditional approach of transcribing counselling tapes. Others have explored the usefulness of the Internet to deliver courses at a distance from the main university campus (Bailey & Cotlar, 1994; Sanders & Rosenfield, 1998). Despite the seemingly increased use of computer technology in counselling programs, there does not appear to be any concentrated attention upon the use of this technology in the training and supervision of counsellors even though counselling programs seem to increasingly deliver courses at a distance.

In its current form, CAS, a computer program designed specifically for counselling supervision, allows beginning counsellors to effectively rate and assess their own counselling skills, interventions, and intentions while they review videotapes of their counselling. An earlier prototype used a somewhat cumbersome process utilizing Microsoft Excel, which had some definite benefits but needed an efficient template: one that could be used more economically by beginning counsellors and required less monitoring from the counselling supervisor. The present CAS program meets these criteria.

CAS, which is intended to support rather than replace the supervisor in the supervisory process, deliberately joins intentional counselling with computer

technology, making it effective as a teaching/supervisory tool. Though currently stored on a CD ROM, CAS can also be used as a web-based program. Beginning counsellors who use CAS are able to use a "help" command in the program to access definitions of the different intentions, and view short video clips of two counsellors role-playing the various intentions. The video clips are partly scripted, showing two counsellors who role-play scenarios that demonstrate each of the 19 intentions. For example, if the intention were "cognitions," the video clip would show how the counsellor identifies and works with the maladaptive or irrational thoughts or belief system of the client.

What are Counsellor Intentions: Providing a Foundation for CAS

Because CAS is based upon a model of counsellor intentions, it is important to consider how the concept of counsellor intentions is understood in the literature. Several decades ago, Davidson (1963) proposed a causal link between intention and subsequent action, and later Searle (1983) distinguished between intentionality and consciousness, or awareness of one's thoughts and feelings as a counsellor (since one may be fully conscious of one's internal state yet respond unintentionally). Close to the same time, Hill and O'Grady's (1985) examination of a counselling process model presented a comprehensive and detailed list of 19 counsellor intentions they developed from therapist recall of the video- and audiotaped sessions of two separate studies. Their proposed counselling intentions include:

1. *Set limits:* to structure or establish guidelines concerning the nature of counseling, goals of counseling, methods for attaining goals, expectations about treatment, or parameters of the relationship
2. *Get information:* to gather specific facts about the client, such as history, functioning, or plans
3. *Give information:* to educate, give facts, or give reasons for specific counselor actions
4. *Support:* to provide warmth, support, or empathy for the purpose of establishing or strengthening the relationship; to help the client feel accepted, validated, understood; to provide a nurturing environment
5. *Focus:* to help the client get back on track or focus on the appropriate in-session task
6. *Clarify:* to provide or solicit continued explanation or more detailed explanation when the client or counselor has been vague
7. *Hope:* to let the client know that change is both possible and likely to occur; to let the client know that the counselor is able to help
8. *Cathart:* to help in the expression of client feelings and problems: to promote relief from tensions
9. *Cognitions:* to identify maladaptive or irrational thoughts or beliefs
10. *Behaviors:* to identify or provide feedback concerning maladaptive client behaviors; to do a behavioral analysis

11. *Self-control:* to encourage the client to gain a sense of personal mastery over thoughts, feelings, or behaviors; to help the client accept responsibility for thoughts, feelings, or behaviors

12. *Feelings:* to identify, intensify, or promote the acceptance of feelings; to encourage the client to experience feelings at a deeper level

13. *Insight:* to aid in understanding of the underlying reasons, dynamics, or motivations for cognitions, behaviors, or feelings: for example, helping the client understand reactions to the behavior of others

14. *Change:* to help the client develop new and more adaptive skills, behaviors, or cognitions in dealing with the self or others; helping to instill more adaptive models, explanations, or conceptualizations

15. *Reinforce change:* to provide positive reinforcement for client attempts at cognitive, behavioral, or affective change

16. *Resistance:* to work at overcoming obstacles to change or progress; for example, may discuss failure to adhere to the terms agreed upon for counseling; discussion may involve anticipated obstacles or current obstacles

17. *Challenge:* to confront the client to test the validity, reality, or appropriateness of client thoughts, feelings, beliefs, or behaviors; may be done to jolt or shake up the client

18. *Relationship:* to maintain a good working alliance by working out problems in the relationship as they arise; to handle ruptures in the alliance; to work with client transference as it affects the relationship

19. *Counselor needs:* to protect, relieve, or defend the counselor; to alleviate counselor anxiety. (p. 9)

Hill and O'Grady (1985) define counsellor intention as a specific behaviour or response mode, technique, or intervention, and contend that therapists choose an intention on the basis of a number of significant variables, including the presenting problem, diagnosis, behavioural observations, clinical hypotheses, personal reactions, overall treatment plan, and the specific task of treatment. Further, they observe that a counsellor may operate from more than one intention at a time. From the perspective of using CAS, in any hypothetical transaction with a client, a counsellor may determine that he or she was operating with the intention of getting information from the client because of the questions that were asked. Any transaction between the counsellor and the client could contain more than one intention. For example, the counsellor might be intentionally trying to encourage catharsis, clarify the client's feelings, or focus their discussion. The counsellor may be trying to provide the client with insight, while her body language and tone may be offering support. In fact, there may be other ways in which the counsellor could respond more effectively to the client, such as coupling an empathic response with a more open-ended question, enabling the client to put words to feelings, and gain further insight and relief. Assessing counsellor intentions using CAS software in this manner allows the beginning counsellors

to be increasingly aware of why they are asking particular questions or making specific comments to clients.

Tomm (1987) speculates that, as a society and as a profession, we usually operate from a place of purpose or intention, and our actions in any given situation are reflective of this cognitive position. CAS is specifically designed to identify the counsellor's purpose or intention during any counselling session, thus allowing the beginning counsellor to be more cognizant of his or her interventions. Tomm speculates that everything a counsellor says is an intervention. Specific to the study of counselling and CAS in particular, beginning counsellors' intentions focus on reasons for their response mode (why do they say what they say?), intervention, technique, or the therapeutic stance they adopt. Hamer (1995), in his critical examination of the literature about counsellor intentions, believes that in order to truly understand the meaning of a therapeutic intervention, "one must have access not only to the physical characteristics of the intervention (such as speech content), but also to the intentions that give rise to the intervention" (p. 259). Once again, CAS allows beginning counsellors to have access to their intentions, and promotes supervisory practices that (a) promote the value of having counsellors examine not only their purposes, plans, and goals, but also the underlying factors and motives behind their interventions; (b) ensures that the needs of the client are served; and (c) ensures that the interventions in question are in the client's best interest.

Horvath, Marx, and Kamann (1990) identify the two perspectives of counsellor intentions as the "reason" and the "plan," noting that most lists of intentions (Hill and O'Grady's among them) emphasize the "reason" perspective. The reason for the action taken by the counsellor is based upon the counsellor's interpretation of client thoughts, affect, and behaviour, and is the focus of CAS. The plan, on the other hand, focuses on the counsellor's goal for the client. Horvath et al. created their own 16-item list of intentions based on this second perspective, beginning with the words "I wanted my client to…" or "My counsellor wanted me to…"

With respect to how counsellors might concentrate more diligently on intentions in their counselling, consider the following scenario:

> In a small, comfortably furnished office, a heavily built, well-dressed man in his thirties sits silently in one of the two wing-backed chairs, staring around the counsellor's office. His nervousness betrays the depth of emotion he is feeling as he sits there, fighting back tears. The late afternoon sun streams in through a west-facing window, making patterns on the floor at his feet, but he is oblivious to his surroundings. The occupant of the other chair leans forward, and responding to what he has just shared with her, remarks in a low voice, "That's the part that really hurts, isn't it?" The question is more statement than question. The man nods mutely, as the tears begin to slip down the sides of his face.

In this scenario, the counsellor's actions do not occur in a vacuum, but her body language, worldview, and words are meant to convey support and validation to the client. There are reasons and goals behind her response. She means to let the client know that she hears him, understands his pain, and is concerned for his

well-being. In this example, the counsellor might use a variety of skills such as empathy, probing, or various other techniques, but what's important for the relationship are her intentions. CAS emphasizes the latter rather than skill development.

Researchers who have employed Hill and O'Grady's (1985) counselling processing model have produced some interesting research outcomes. For example, Barraclough (2001) examined the relationship between *intention* categories and the intention of being empathic, and found that empathy training increased men's intention to be empathic while it decreased women's. Barraclough also found that the *intentions* of "support" and "assessment" were reliable indicators of either the presence or absence of empathy in the counselling session. Miller (1997) discussed how *counsellor intentions* function within the process of counselling within the framework of the cognitive mediational paradigm, which indicates that both counsellors and clients are cognitively active during counselling and that this cognitive activity mediates between counselling process and counselling outcomes. Mahalik (1996) also used Hill and O'Grady's counselling process model with 24 undergraduate clients assigned to counselling treatment with 24 doctoral students who reviewed three videotaped counselling sessions and recorded their reactions and *intentions*, respectively. Consistent with the hypothesis, client vocational interests were predictive of client evaluations of *counsellor* interventions.

CAS is based upon research that supports the idea that linking therapist intentions with therapist responses is a useful pursuit in the training of beginning counsellors (Hill & O'Grady, 1985; Horvath et al., 1990; Miller, 1997). The correlation of counsellor intentions and actions to the outcomes of counselling should also be obvious. Counsellors who are aware of their intentions, the factors that affect these intentions, as well as what constitutes "good therapy" will ultimately provide counselling services contributing to the recovery and healing of their clients.

How Beginning Counsellors Use CAS

This article offers an alternative approach to the supervision of beginning counsellors enrolled in counsellor education programs. Informed by teaching and supervision practices, I describe below a process of interaction between a supervisor and a beginning counsellor enhanced through the prior self-evaluation of counselling intentions using CAS.

Beginning counsellors enrolled in graduate counselling practica make videotapes of counselling sessions, using real clients or graduate students posing as clients. Within 24 hours of taping, beginning counsellors review their tapes using the CAS program. At the end of each transaction (defined as either one minute of video play or one complete verbal transaction between counsellor and client), they reflect upon their responses to their clients during those particular transactions. They reflect upon questions such as "What were my intentions here?" and "What was I trying to communicate to my client?" Beginning counsellors are directed by CAS to record their intentions by clicking on buttons correspond-

ing to the 19 intentions listed on the screen. During any transaction between the beginning counsellor and the client, there could be several intentions. For example, the beginning counsellor might be attempting to clarify what a client is saying with the intention of focusing on change using a cognitive strategy. In this example the beginning counsellor would select three intentions for that transaction.

Beginning counsellors continue reviewing their tapes, which are generally 35–40 minutes in length, recording their counselling intentions in the process. An added feature with CAS is the narrative log, as exemplified in Table 1.

Table 1
Sample Narrative Log During CAS Session

Transaction	Counsellor Response
4	In this section of the session there are many non-verbal comments, which inform the client that support and encouragement is being offered. I simply wanted the client to know that I was present, that what she was saying was actively being listened to.
5	Non-verbal comments continue to offer support to client in order to enable client to feel accepted and connected in the relationship. The client was trying to convey some very strong feeling she was experiencing towards her partner. Having empathically responded earlier, I felt non-verbal support such as nods and my facial expressions were more appropriate.
6	At this juncture I summarize for the client what has occurred so far in the session. This was done in order to meet the client's stated goal of wanting to have clarification about her relationship options and to be clear concerning future possibilities for finding work should she decide to leave her partner.

*Note.* The table provides a sample of the actual narrative of a beginning counsellor using CAS.

During the self-evaluative and self-monitoring process, a narrative box appears after counsellors record their intentions (they cannot proceed beyond this point until they enter a response). In the narrative log, beginning counsellors reflect upon what they were doing at that particular point in the counselling process, and they expand upon their intentions in writing. In this example, the beginning counsellor entered brief responses. The depth and breadth of narrative response will vary, but it is hoped that, with supervision, the beginning counsellor will expand upon his or her narratives to give a greater account of the internal processes and reflections during the session review.

Supervision with CAS

In the next phase of CAS, beginning counsellors review their own graphs, which they would have created from their counselling interviews. As an example, Figure 1 illustrates how one beginning counsellor used the intentions of "support,"

"focus," "clarify," "hope," and "cathart" throughout a counselling session. (Only five intentions are presented here for demonstration purposes.)

Figure 1
Counsellor Intentions During a Videotaped Counselling Session
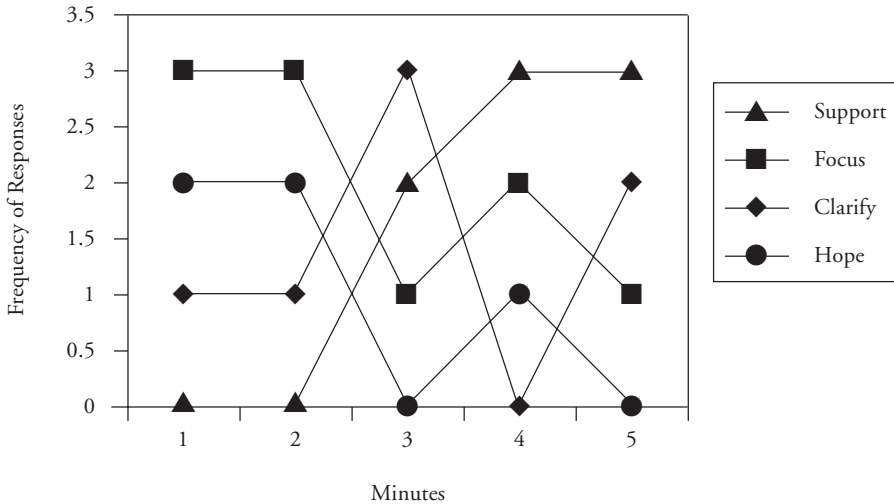
Rather than focusing upon the skills involved in the counselling interview, beginning counsellors reflect upon the processes they went through with their clients, and attend to the intentions behind their responses. When beginning counsellors appropriately empathize with a client, they may conclude that they were offering "support," focusing on "feelings," or orienting the client to "change." Over the course of the review, the beginning counsellors become more aware of evolving patterns with respect to identified intentions. After several sessions of using CAS, beginning counsellors become aware of intentions in their interviews as well as response patterns and idiosyncratic practices that feel comfortable, but do not enhance or improve their counselling abilities.

In the final phase of CAS, beginning counsellors engage in a supervisory conversation using information gleaned from their self-analyses and self-reflections. While watching segments of the taped interview, the supervisor reviews the graphed intentions to assess the beginning counsellor's responding style and identify intentions that were used, not used, or used infrequently.

During supervision, the supervisor encourages beginning counsellors to discuss (a) what they learned from the process of listing their intentions and accompanying narrative, (b) how their intentions related to their particular verbal and non-verbal responses to their clients, (c) what they thought of the choice

of responses, (d) how they thought they might improve their responses, and (e) what they believed were some alternative ways of responding. Overall, beginning counsellors are encouraged to become more aware of intentions in their counselling, and how this relates to their overall counselling plan (see Horvath et al., 1990).

VALUE OF CAS FOR SUPERVISION IN COUNSELLOR EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Although there has not yet been any research using CAS, several research possibilities exist. For example, how might CAS improve or enhance the beginning counsellors' use of intentional counselling? How might the use of CAS affect the supervisory approach of instructors? How might a counsellor's intentions vary when working with a suicidal client versus counselling a client experiencing stress or anxiety? Does the gender of a client differentially influence male and female counsellors' intentions? Another area of research might compare how counsellors' intentions compare to client perceptions of counsellors' intentions. It would also be interesting and important to examine how counselling intentions change throughout the counselling process.

Personal experience in the utilization of CAS indicates the current value of this tool in counsellor supervision and teaching. CAS contributes to the beginning counsellor's instruction by assisting supervisors as they learn more about their own teaching style. Kivlighan (1989) suggested that, "Perhaps instructors are more adept at teaching attending/listening and empathic skills (explore intentions) than at teaching influencing skills (restructure intentions)" (p. 475). By analyzing how beginning counsellors rate their own counselling intentions, supervisors can evaluate how they are interpreting the instructional content of their program. For example, if beginning counsellors focus more on counselling intentions that show "support" versus those intentions oriented more toward "change," supervisors might need to reflect on their teaching practices as one means of changing how beginning counsellors respond to their clients.

Another advantage of CAS is that it allows beginning counsellors to reflect more on their own approaches to counselling. Miller (1997) discusses the importance for counsellors to be intentional, that awareness of the intention behind the choice of technique increases the likelihood that the counsellor will make appropriate well-timed choices that are in the client's best interest in the future. Reviewing their tapes within 24 hours of a counselling session helps beginning counsellors reflect upon their own processes in the counselling interviews, critically evaluating "why" they are responding as they are, and assessing whether the directions in which they are leading the session (and the corresponding goals they have for their clients) are their desired directions. Horvath et al. (1990) refer to this as the "plan" for the counselling session.

CAS can also be utilized in group supervision. Traditionally, the instruction of beginning counsellors, at both the master's and doctoral levels, has followed

either an individual or a group supervisory process. Though most of the research has examined individual models of supervision, a review by Prieto (1996) indicates that group supervision is also widespread in training professional counsellors. Although outcome variables may differ for each of these two modes of supervision, both focus on increasing the counselling competencies of beginning counsellors.

One last advantage of CAS is the value it brings to courses taught via distant education. Counselling courses often require intensive instructor supervision. The difficulty of providing this supervision is increased when courses are offered at great distances from the main campus. With CAS software, the instructor gives the beginning counsellors greater responsibility for their own learning, providing more optimal one-to-one supervision.

<div align="center">CONCLUSION</div>

CAS utilizes self-monitoring of counselling processes, the merits of which were outlined by Haferkamp (1989). In preliminary investigations with CAS, beginning counsellors charted seven of their counselling sessions, yet only four of these sessions were supervised. Self-monitoring with CAS was combined with individual supervision of the beginning counsellors' sessions, and allowed them the benefit of obtaining feedback on their performance through self-monitoring and self-reflection prior to their supervision sessions.

CAS was designed to enhance current supervisory practices in counsellor education. Using Hill and O'Grady's (1985) model of counsellor intentions, this software allows both beginning counsellors and practicum supervisors more flexibility in the supervisory process, and augments current teaching practices. Although this article describes the use of CAS in a teaching and learning environment, the use of this program to augment current practices has implications for future research in counsellor supervision.

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About the Author

Ron Lehr, Ph.D., is Associate Professor in the Counselling Program, School of Education, at Acadia University, Wolfville, Nova Scotia.

Address correspondence to Ron Lehr, P.O. Box 57, Wolfville, NS, B4P 2R6,
e-mail <ron.lehr@acadiau.ca>.