

2017

## Student Perceptions of Online Video Cases to Promote Helping Skills Training

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### Recommended Citation

McCarthy, C., & French, K. (2017). Student Perceptions of Online Video Cases to Promote Helping Skills Training. *The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 9(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.7729/92.1160>

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# Student Perceptions of Online Video Cases to Promote Helping Skills Training

## **Abstract**

Video case based learning was integrated with multimodal online learning to facilitate helping skills training for graduate students. Five online cases were utilized before students participated in classroom-based role-plays and live practice. Students' reactions to the activity were positive, and recommendations for counselor training are described.

## **Author's Notes**

The authors acknowledge the assistance of Dr. Aaron Rochlen in developing the videos described in this manuscript.

## **Keywords**

helping skills, video case based learning, counselor education

Training in helping skills (also called microskills; Carkhuff, 2011) is widely recognized as a fundamental component of training for professional helpers, both in the counseling field (Hill, Knox, & Sullivan, 2007) and in related disciplines such as social work (Gockel & Burton, 2014), medicine (Jackson & Back, 2011), and student affairs (Reynolds, 2011). Hill et al. (2007) noted that introductory helping skills courses that focus primarily on exploration skills (such as reflecting the content and feelings of a client), and later introduce students to more advanced skills such as theoretical integration and case conceptualization. This manuscript describes how video case based learning (VCBL), when used in a hybrid learning environment (i.e., an environment that includes both face-to-face and online learning), can familiarize students with foundational reflecting skills (i.e., reflecting the content, feeling, and meaning of what is said) before practicing live in a helping skills course. VCBL in this context served as a bridge for learning and skill development between reading about helping skills and live practice in class. Specifically, it allowed students to practice and receive brief, individualized feedback about their use of reflecting skills in an attempt to increase their comfort level and readiness. An exploratory qualitative case study of students taking the Helping Skills course was also conducted to gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions of the experience, with the ultimate goal of using this knowledge to improve the design of the activity, and to offer recommendations for counselor educators.

### **Theoretical Foundation for Helping Skill Training**

Historically, counselor training programs focused mainly on conceptual skills (e.g., how to think about client issues) and content areas (e.g., theories of counseling) until Truax and Carkhuff (1967) argued that students needed skill-based training to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Ridley, Kelly, & Mollen, 2011). Carl Rogers (1951, 1957) theorized that in

order to be effective, a helper must demonstrate the core conditions of unconditional positive regard, congruence, and empathy to clients. However, Truax and Carkhuff (1967) reviewed research on counselor training and determined this was insufficient as training paradigms at the time failed to bridge the gap between didactic instruction and practice. In other words, students were taught that they should exhibit Rogers' core conditions but not trained how.

Truax and Carkhuff (1967) developed a skills-based curriculum founded on Carl Rogers' client-centered theory (1951, 1957), which involved watching experts, role-playing, and feedback for helping skills training. Allen Ivey (1971) then pioneered the microskills approach, which added the critical step of training specific microskills, in sequential order, to reduce the complexity of the training process (Ivey, Ivey, & Zalaquett, 2010). Ivey's model also included watching expert demonstrations, reading about specific skills, recording practice with skills, and receiving feedback, with a particular emphasis on learning skills in a structured sequence (Ivey et al., 2010).

Effective use of microskills is critical because it constitutes the foundation of the helping relationship, setting the stage for shared understanding of helpee concerns and a collaborative relationship (Hill, 2014). Microskills training has remained the dominant paradigm for more than four decades, with Clara Hill's (2014) model representing a comprehensive approach. The Hill model primarily grew out of Carkhuff's (2011) Human Resource Training (HRT) model (Hill, Spangler, Chui, & Jackson, 2014), and focuses on three stages in the change process: Exploration, Insight, and Action. According to Hill (2014), in the exploration stage helpers "seek to establish rapport, develop a therapeutic relationship, encourage clients to tell their stories, help clients explore thoughts and feelings, facilitate the arousal of emotions, and learn about clients" (p. 34). In other words, this initial stage of helping establishes a working alliance between helper

and helpee that establishes the foundation for all future work. The following stages of the model involve helping clients achieve new understandings about themselves (insight) and develop strategies for change (action).

Hill et al. (2007) suggested that students learn fundamental helping skills early in training so that they “become automatic and recede into the background” (Hill et al., 2007, p. 366) – in other words, so that they become ingrained and do not require as much conscious attention in the helping process. Mastery of these fundamental skills allows students to focus on higher order skills as their training progresses. It should be noted however fundamental helping skills remain important throughout a helper’s career: as an example, Cook, Biyanova, Elhai, and Schnurr (2010) found in a web-based survey of over 2,200 psychotherapists’ use of specific counseling techniques, that the top six categories selected in the multiple choice survey included microskills, such as “convey warmth, caring, and respect” (used by 97%), “communicate understanding of the client’s experience” (used by 90%), and “make reflective or clarifying comments” (used by 89%) (p. 263).

While helping skills are a critical part of the counselor’s job, learning how to use them can be a source of discomfort and anxiety for new graduate students (Hill et al., 2007). Anxiety may in turn impact students’ self-efficacy, which has been found to correlate with long term counselor performance (Larson et al., 1999). Thus, it is important that new trainees begin with experiences that are both instructive and low-stakes. Role-playing becomes an important part of shaping counselor self-efficacy (Osborn & Costas, 2013), but for the newest students who have few positive or negative experiences to gauge their abilities as a counselor, the stakes can be particularly high (Larson et al., 1999).

It is therefore important for instructors to design courses in helping skills that address these sources of anxiety early in the class. Specifically, instructors must take into consideration the initial, acute experience of performance anxiety that some students will experience when asked to practice in front of peers and instructor (Larson et al., 1999). Secondly, while students often enter the counseling field with some experience in helping skills, they are often less comfortable with using them in a proscribed manner (Carkhuff, 2011). Students who are used to responding to others spontaneously in everyday life may find using helping responses in an intentional way may seem unnatural and frustrating. Finally, a less acknowledged source of anxiety can be the concern that students are not actually as good at helping skills as they believed (Huhra, Yamokoski-Maynhart, & Prieto, 2008), leading to the fear of being revealed as unsuited for the counseling field.

The video case learning activity described in this paper was designed to provide students an opportunity to acquire familiarity and comfort with fundamental reflecting skills (response to content, feeling, and meaning) before being asked to practice these skills in vivo. The timing of the introduction of the VCBL was important: it was designed to ease the transition between reading and watching demonstrations of reflecting skills and role-plays with peers in class. Consistent with Carkhuff's (2011) terminology, throughout this manuscript we will use the term helper or student to refer to graduate counseling students in training, and the term helpee for those they are helping. The term reflecting skills will be used to refer to the specific skills that explore helpee thoughts and feelings in order to demonstrate active listening and facilitator exploration (Carkhuff, 2011), which was the focus of the VCBL.

## **Incorporating Technology in Helping Skills Instruction**

A number of pedagogical approaches are typically used in helping skills courses, including didactic presentations, demonstrations by the instructor, and small group practice. Lux and Sivakumaran (2010) noted that the use of technology for helping skills training is becoming increasingly common. This trend dovetails with the key role that technology plays in the lives of 21st Century students. A recent national survey found that more than four in five college students took courses that included an online component, and the same study found that 99% of U.S. universities utilize learning management systems to deliver course content and support online collaboration (Dahlstrom & Bichsel, 2014).

Lux and Sivakumaran (2010) noted that training standards promulgated by bodies such as the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) emphasize the use of technology as a best practice for training. In recent years, several specific ways of utilizing technology for helper training have appeared in the literature. Walter and Thanasui (2011) proposed the use of pocket camcorders to record and immediately view footage of helping skills to train students. Adcock, Duggan, and Perry (2010) also developed the Computer Agents Teaching Helping Interactions Effectively (CATHIE) program, which is a web based interview simulation designed to help human services and counseling students learn fundamental helping skills. The CATHIE program, designed by a team of computer engineers, content experts, and instructional designers, utilizes computer-based agents and an immersive environment that provides students with immediate feedback on their responses to simulated clients in simplified case scenarios (Adcock et al., 2010).

Interactive tools such as this provide a space for meaningful practice that bridges the challenges identified above related to the early didactics of a helping skills course with the later experiential component. Online interactions increase the number of student practice opportunities, and enable individual feedback beyond the temporal boundaries set by a class meeting. Huhra et al. (2008) suggested the need for trainees to develop helping skills through highly structured experiences that reduce the initial level of complexity presented and for them to receive detailed feedback about their skills. Research has not yet determined which instructional strategies are optimal for each aspect of helping skills acquisition, particularly in the initial stages of training (Gockel & Burton, 2014). While helpful, solutions that require teams of computer and content experts to develop both require a heavy resource investment and can lead to a lack flexibility for counselor educators to modify learning systems for their own needs. For this reason, the authors explored an approach that leverages technology that is accessible to most higher education faculty members: the learning management system (LMS).

Learning management systems (e.g., Canvas, Blackboard, Sakai, D2L) are now used by most universities as a convenient online platform to help instructors organize content and support interaction during and between class sessions (Dahlstrom & Bichsel, 2014). When a platform (Canvas) emerged that allowed instructors to upload and organize videos and allowed students to submit audio responses, the authors decided to explore this option for hosting interactive video cases. They chose this approach based on research that had combined video technology and cased-based learning to promote learning helping skills in a low-stakes setting tracing back over a decade (Koch & Dollarhide, 2000) and growing research in medical, teacher and counselor education that supports the use of video cases in an online environment (Beitzel & Derry, 2009; Pierce & Wooloff, 2012). The decisions behind the presentation of each case and the student



prompt reflected not only the instructional goals of the course, but also an understanding of the developmental stage of the students as early novice helpers. In other words, in the early stages of learning helping skills, the content presented in videos should minimize complexity. Further, having the students respond directly after watching simulates actual interchanges that occur in live practice (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). The expert responses serve as models, and the timely feedback from the instructor serves as a formative assessment (Bransford et al., 2000). We will next describe how video case based learning (VCBL) can be integrated with widely-accessible learning management systems, such as Canvas, to introduce students to fundamental reflecting skills in a virtual setting on their own time before they are asked to practice live during class time.

### **Embedding the VCBL Activity into a Helping Skills Course**

Foundational helping skills courses typically focus on teaching students a progressive series of skills that include reflecting, summarizing, asking questions, attending to non-verbal communication, and demonstrating empathy (Adcock et al., 2010; Walter & Thanasiu, 2011). Such was the purpose of the course described here, with the first few class sessions devoted to readings (see Hill, 2014), and instructor demonstration of helping skills. After the first few meetings, students practiced helping skills in small groups - typically in triads in which they rotate through the roles of helper, helpee, and observer.

The VCBL described in this article provided students with practice in three types of responding skills: reflection of content, feeling, and meaning. Reflection of content is a skill that involves restating what the helpee has already said in a condensed manner to facilitate further exploration. Such reflections are often prefaced in training with a suggested response format such as “what I hear you saying is (content)” to facilitate clarity about how to format such

responses. Reflections of feeling refer to a response in which the helper identifies one or more helpee feelings, based on the information shared by the helpee and their nonverbal communication. Such responses are often preceded with statements such as “You are feeling (feeling word).” According to Carkhuff (2011), these two responses can be combined in a response he labeled response to meaning, which combines both reflection of content and feeling, using the format “you feel (content) because (feeling).” According to Carkhuff, when accurate, such responses facilitate further exploration of helpee experiences and their progression towards understanding (insight) and change (action).

Every instructor at the university is encouraged to host course materials on the Canvas LMS. For face-to-face classes, Canvas usually serves as a central repository for readings, syllabi, assignments and grades, but it offers additional functionality for hosting asynchronous discussion, chat, and multimedia streaming or upload. The multimodal response and feedback to video cases activity combines a number of these capabilities. The video cases themselves were developed by the first author and uploaded to the College of Education’s YouTube channel (<http://ow.ly/R3KTH>), and are presented to students as embedded videos (see next section for further description of the video cases). The web page for each case includes a picture of the helpee along with an overview of the case and links where they can access each video segment. For example, the link *Reflection of Content* allows the student to access the first video segment and then to record their response to the first helpee statement.

Students who view the course site from a computer submit audio responses via a web browser plugin, and mobile devices also offer an audio recording option (i.e., Android or iOS phone or tablet). Once students submit the audio response, instructors use a grading tool - Speedgrader - to provide feedback on each student’s response for each case from the web

interface. The tool allows for text, audio, or video feedback formats, but after multiple iterations of the activity we found that text is the quickest and easiest to produce. Watching the expert responses and the processing session is a simple matter of watching another set of embedded videos. The expert example links take students to a pre-recorded video with an experienced helper demonstrating how they would respond to the helpee statement.

### **Video Cases Used in VCBL Activity**

Following Huhra et al.'s (2008) recommendation, the VCBL learning activity was designed to provide students an opportunity to practice fundamental helping skills in a non-threatening environment and receive systematic feedback prior to being asked to do so in front of their peers in class. The development of video cases was supported by a small technology grant in the authors' college. This funding was provided for developing and recording five vignettes to be used in the website and for technological assistance in developing the functionality of the website. The video segments in the activity portrayed a range of topics that counselors typically encounter (e.g., concerns about choosing a career, roommate trouble). Given that the goal of this project was to provide practice in all three fundamental responses (response to content, feeling, and meaning), each video was divided into segments that would allow students to practice each response in sequence, and then to have an opportunity to watch a more experienced counselor use that response with the same client. These expert segments were supervised by the first author who has taught the course for over 20 years so that they demonstrated the use of each skill with each client using the format prescribed in the course readings and class demonstrations. The five client scenarios - created to give students a chance to practice with a range of helpee topics - were fictional descriptions of typical concerns addressed in counseling, such as career concerns and problems with roommates. The term client is used here to refer only to the person portrayed

in each video case, so as not to be confused with the more general term helpee used throughout the manuscript. Advanced graduate students were recruited to play the role of client and the role of helper in the videos.

### **Structure and Sequence of the VCBL Activity**

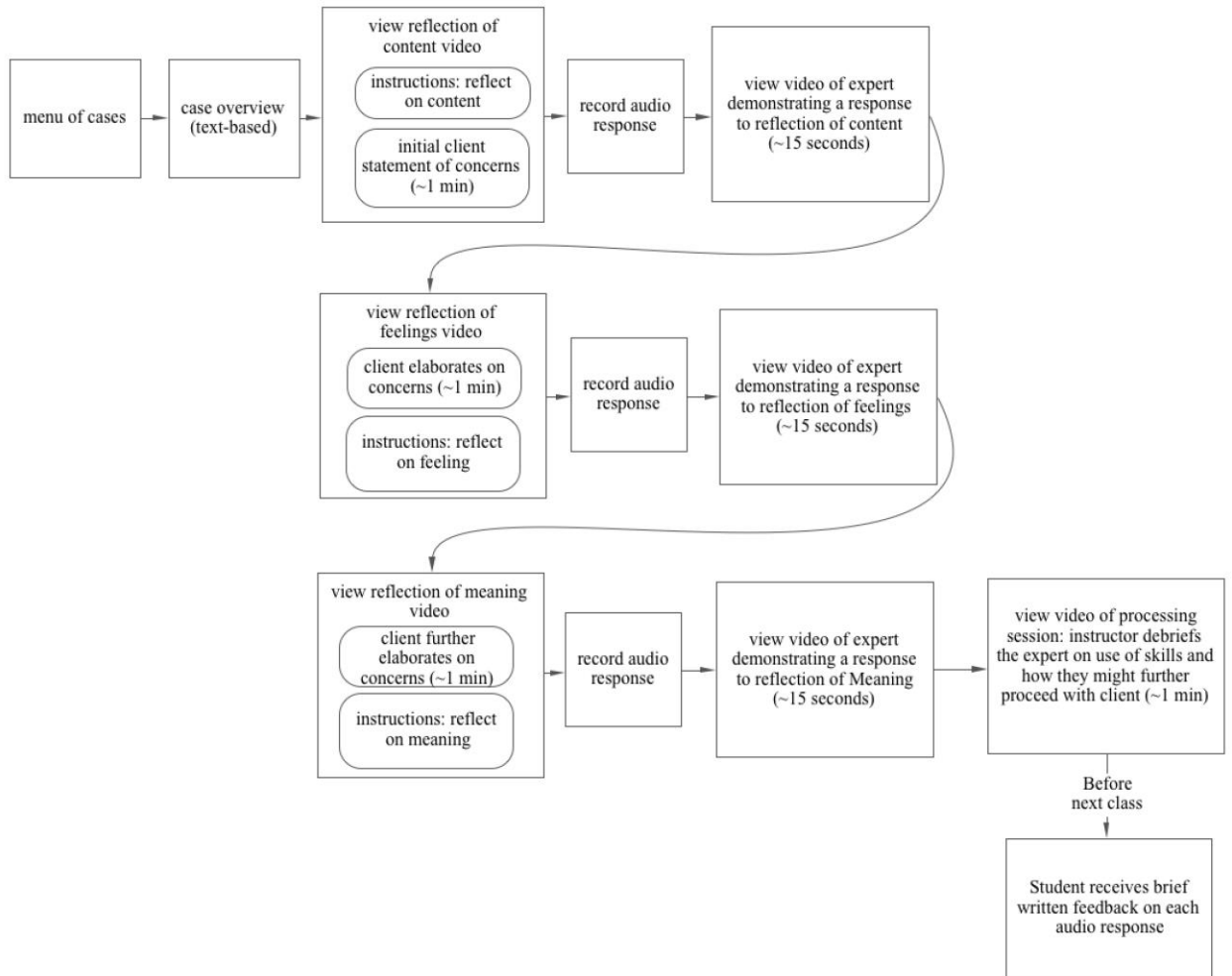
Students were assigned VCBL activities to complete in each of the first few weeks of the class. They completed two cases between the second and third class, two the following week, and the final case before the fifth class meeting. The pacing of these assignments was intentional: the first two cases allowed for on-line practice after reading about helping skills, but before their first role-play. The ensuing cases were assigned over the subsequent two weeks so that students could continue on-line practice during the first few weeks of beginning role-plays.

The client videos were divided into three segments: an initial clip in which the client describes their concerns, and two additional video clips in which the client continues to elaborate on their concerns. Figure 1 depicts the sequence of the VCBL activity, which proceeds in the following manner: the student is first presented with text describing the format for responding to content, and then after watching the first client segment, the student records their response to content for that video segment. Each video segment is preceded by written text explaining the skill to be practiced following that clip. The student is then presented with text describing the format for responding to feelings, which is followed with the second video segment, in which the client elaborates on their concerns. After recording their response to feeling, the student is provided with text instructing them in how to respond to meaning, following by the third and final client video segment. Students have the option to record their responses for each segment using an audio or video format.

While the system provides the students with the ability to delay or repeat recordings, we encourage them to record a single immediate response rather than rehearsing or re-recording in order to provide a more realistic simulation of a helping interaction. Following each clip, after the student records a response, they are then provided with the opportunity to watch a more experienced helper provide a response. Once completing these steps, students had the opportunity to watch the instructor debrief the more experienced helper, discussing how they developed their responses and how they might continue to work with the client. In order to promote extended practice on-line, students are typically assigned one or two of the cases each week during the beginning weeks of the semester (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Graphic illustration of video case based learning sequence of activities



Written feedback from the instructor or a graduate teaching assistant is provided to each student online for each response to each scenario. The goal is to provide clear and timely feedback, so simplicity is a key factor. Therefore, each instance of feedback is usually just a brief sentence. The feedback might take the form of a positive statement noting the student used the skills correctly, or a suggestion for improvement, such as being more concise when reflecting content or making sure to use accurate feeling words when reflecting feelings.

As patterns of responses to the video cases emerge, these are discussed during class as learning opportunities. Typically, we have found certain patterns emerge as students begin to practice these skills: their responses to content are often longer than necessary at first, as they attempt to restate almost everything the helpee has said in an effort to avoid missing any content. Students often struggle at first when attempting to use accurate feeling words, and find they need to expand their emotion vocabulary to accurately capture the type and intensity of feelings expressed by their helpee. For example, students might use the response, “you feel like things are not working out”, which is intended as a reflection of feeling, but does not actually label the feelings the helpee might be experiencing, such as frustration or anger.

## **Preliminary Evaluation of Student Reactions to VCBL**

### **Research Questions**

Our research design and the methods employed reflect an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivists posit a notion of reality as existing outside of an individual. They view understanding as an “intellectual process whereby a knower... gains knowledge about an object (Schwandt, 2001, p. 194).” The goal of interpretivist research is to discover the meaning of human action (Schwandt, 2001). While the theoretical goals of this study are modest, we felt it

was important to understand the students' perspective as we move forward with new technology tools. To gain this insight, we asked three questions:

1. To what extent did the students find the VCBL activity helpful, and what about it did they find helpful?
2. What, if anything, about the VCBL did the students find problematic or see as interfering with their learning of helping skills?
3. What ideas did students have for addressing issues related to problems with the activity?

### **Participants**

The course in which the VCBL takes place is offered twice a year, once in the fall semester and once in the summer, and typically enrolls 15 - 20 people. During the summer, the course is primarily taken by first year counselor education students (who entered the program the previous fall), and offered in a compressed format - taught daily for two and one-half weeks. During the fall (when data collection took place) the course takes place over the typical 15-week long semester and is also open to counseling psychology students and graduate students in related fields. While the fall semester enrolled proportionately fewer counselor education students than in the summer, the longer time frame of the semester seemed more appropriate to evaluating students' perceptions of the experience, since students had a week between each class to complete assigned cases and receive feedback. In the summer, this process is condensed to just a day or two. This study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board and granted exempt status.

There were 19 students taking the course during the fall semester in which this evaluation took place. Two were master's students in counselor education, seven were doctoral students in Counseling Psychology, nine were masters or doctoral students in Higher Education Affairs, and



one was a graduate student in Nursing. The majority were female (15); information about ethnic/racial identification was not collected. All of the counseling students (counselor education and counseling psychology) were in their first year of study, while most of the other graduate students were in their second year of study. To ensure that their previous coursework had not included helping skills training, the instructor screens all non-counseling students taking the course. Therefore, while some of the students (particularly those not in the counseling field) may have had several semesters of coursework in topics related to helping professions, the helping skills content was new to all. All students taking the course were asked to complete a brief, open-ended instructor-developed survey after they had completed all VCBL activities (approximately four weeks after the course began); the response rate was 100%.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The survey was administered the week after all VCBL cases were completed, which was approximately five weeks into the semester. This was done to gather data about students' perceptions of the VCBL while that experience was recent and at a time when they had just begun to role-play in order to foreground the transition from reading about reflecting skills to actual practice. With the primary goal of improving the design of the activity in mind, we asked students the following questions: (1) What has been helpful to you about practicing reflections using the on-line videos?; (2) Has anything about the on-line video cases caused problems for you or interfered with your learning of helping skills?; and (3) What would you do to address any concerns listed in question 2? In addition to these open-ended items, students were asked to rate "overall how helpful they have found the on-line video cases in developing their helping skills so far" from 1 (not helpful) to 5 (very helpful). Seven students rating the experience 5, ten rated it 4, one student rating it 3 and one student rating it 2. The student who gave the 2 rating

did acknowledge, “I haven’t checked to see if there’s individual feedback, but that would help.” This might indicate the student’s lower rating was reflective of them not fully participated in the VCBL at the time of the evaluation.

We began the analysis phase by examining survey responses and looking for themes within and across the responses of individuals. We then used the constant comparative method to group and then regroup the initial open codes into refined categories, or axial codes (Glazer & Strauss, 1967). As we worked, we maintained an audit trail of our notes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and we used analytical memos to record our thinking as categories came together and themes emerged (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Once we had constructed a code sheet, we returned to the response data and counted the number of responses per code. Themes associated with four or more participants were labeled primary and themes associated with least three participants were labeled secondary.

In an effort maximize the trustworthiness of our coding scheme (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), we asked members of the senior author’s graduate student research team - each of whom had previously taken the helping skills course before to examine survey responses - to view the code framework and tell us if they thought it needed any revisions. We then met to discuss potential revisions to the coding scheme - none suggested changes. We then asked the research team members to look back at the themes per participant to look for areas of disagreement. They quickly and easily reached consensus on that data as well.

## **Results**

One of the primary themes that emerged from question 1 (helpful) was labeled *non-threatening environment*. The following quote was representative of this theme: “I appreciate the opportunity to practice a skill in a safe environment that would otherwise make me feel

extremely awkward.” This theme was the most frequent among all responses and indicated many students experienced increased comfort by practicing on-line before role-playing the skills in class.

The second primary theme identified was *systematic practice with basic skills*, which referred to practicing skills in a specific, structured sequence. As was noted above, for each case students were asked to practice first responding to content, then feeling, then meaning, with each segment preceded by a reminder of the response format to use. Following each practice response, the participants then watched a more experienced student providing a response to the same client segment. A representative quote for this theme was: “It’s helpful to concentrate on one part (meaning vs. feeling vs. content) at a time.” This quote was representative of the general theme that the structured sequencing of the skills in the VCBL allowed students to practice and experience some level of mastery with each skill before moving on to the next skill.

While not as frequent (reported by three participants), two secondary themes emerged from question 1 (helpful), the first of which was *opportunity to practice in a realistic environment*. A representative quote for this theme was: “Feeling that I was in a real life counseling situation.” Responses such as this indicated that to a certain extent the VCBL simulated live practice by giving students an opportunity to listen and respond to helpee comments in much the same way as they would in live practice. The other secondary theme was *opportunity to watch experts*, with the following representative quote: “I also learned from the examples of the experienced counselor.” Clearly, this theme reflected the helpfulness of being able to watch a more experienced helper use the skills they had just practiced with the same helpee statement.

One of the primary themes that emerged from question 2 (not helpful) was labeled *technological difficulties*, which referred to problems students had in accessing or entering their responses to some of the cases. The following quote is representative of this theme: “Only problem has been submitting, the video/audio settings don’t stay saved so it is difficult to respond in a ‘real-time’ way.” This comment reflects the need for instructors using VCBL to address technical concerns reported by students in a timely manner. For this course, students were asked to contact the instructor as soon as possible when they encountered such difficulties, but these responses demonstrate such problems can still be a source of frustration for some.

The other primary theme that emerged from question 2 (not helpful) was labeled *anxiety about doing it wrong*. One representative comment on this theme was a participant who reported “anxiety about doing it wrong” with regard to the cases. This comment demonstrates that while the VCBL may have alleviated some of the anxiety associated with helping skills practice, it was still present for some students. Most of the students did not offer specific suggestions for the question, “What would you do to address any concerns listed in question 2?”, and no consistent themes were identified. The suggestions that were offered had to do with a few students addressing technological issues encountered in the use of the VCBL.

### **Implications for Counselor Training**

The data described above generally supported the use of VCBL described in this manuscript. Overall, students found the experience to be positive (modal rating of 4 on a 5 point scale). Further, their open-ended comments suggested themes that aligned with the goals of the VCBL: many students described it as an opportunity to practice in a realistic, yet safe, environment. Several students also found the opportunity to watch expert demonstrations helpful. The VCBL provided opportunities for self-discovery as evidenced by student comments

that the opportunity to practice using the cases showed them that seemingly simple skills were more complex to use in practice than they previously believed. A number of recommendations follow from our experiences using VCBL for initial counselor training in helping skills.

**Implication #1 Online video cases can provide a non-threatening environment for students to practice fundamental helping skills.**

Helping skills courses may represent one of the few opportunities that new students have to focus on fundamental reflecting skills. Technology will clearly continue to play an important role in graduate instruction and well-designed VCBL activities give students sustained opportunities for practice outside the classroom. A key question is how to best leverage this technology to facilitate student learning. In the context of graduate counseling training, it is important to gain a better understanding of how technology can be used to help students master fundamental skills they will need in counseling practice. Access to videos demonstrating such skills can be one important teaching tool, and the VCBL described in this manuscript could enhance student learning, offer the opportunity for deeper understanding of skills, and to diminish the stage fright that can accompany classroom based practice of helping skills with students and instructors.

**Implication #2: Online video cases can provide students with systematic practice in a realistic environment.**

The lead author developed and used VCBL for several semesters before conducting the preliminary investigation described in this paper. Based on this experience, the VCBL can be an effective tool for providing individual feedback, providing an opportunity to check-in with class members systematically before in vivo practice. This has become increasingly important since limited budgets have necessitated larger course enrollments. Further, providing feedback through

the Canvas LMS allows for a more holistic evaluation of students' overall progress learning skills between classes, allowing for class discussion during the first few weeks about common themes in student progress. Use of the VCBL has led to a much smoother transition between readings and demonstrations of helping skills, and the use of role-plays with other class members, in the first few weeks of the semester.

**Implication #3 Utilizing an existing learning management system to host the videos can simplify the process, but students may still encounter technology difficulties.**

An underlying institutional investment in LMS technology is necessary for hosting the VCBL. As noted, the college where this course was conducted funded some of the initial project development, allowing us time and resources to develop client scenarios, recruit students to play clients, and make and edit the video recordings. Further, the use of VCBL requires technological support, as difficulties occasionally but consistently arose. It is important to give students clear instructions for accessing the websites, and to make sure they use up to date browsers or try different connections if they encounter difficulties.

Some students described in our investigation found the technology challenging. The VCBL allowed students to access the cases at the time of their choosing using the course Canvas site, but since videos were hosted on YouTube, and students submitted responses through the course site, there were opportunities for confusion. In most instances, issues arose when students did not have the latest version of an Internet browser or utilized a slower Internet connection for uploading responses, but user error aside, the result was still frustration.

**Implication #4: The design of a video case based learning activity should reflect its learning objectives, which in this example included practice in a realistic environment and an opportunity to watch experts.**

Considerable thought should be given to the types of scenarios used in the VCBL. This course was designed for counseling students intending to work in a wide range of educational settings, in addition to students in related areas of study such as Higher Education Administration. We therefore utilized a range of scenarios relevant to such sites. Vignettes included difficulties in choosing a career, problems with a roommate, and coping with loss. We found it important to develop sequential segments for each video that allowed the students to practice a progression of skills - for example, in the first video clip, the client described their concern, allowing for a helper to reflect the content of what was said. The next clip typically involved some elaboration of the concern by the client, which allowed for the helper to next practice a response to feeling. The content of such videos can of course be altered to suit the needs of specific students (school counseling, community counseling, etc.) by focusing on client concerns most common in those settings.

Having a specific rationale for using the technology in this way (i.e., because the students need to be able to respond verbally to clients) was essential to the learning objectives of this VCBL. We note this because the use of technology can be exciting or engaging regardless of whether it is serving a learning objective, and has the potential to override educational content if it becomes the focus. Newer tools can broaden the vista of possibilities, but the use of technology should serve the learning objectives, rather than be used just because it is available.

While this technology was used for teaching reflecting skills to novice counselors, additional technology can be used in a meaningful way for more advanced skills. As training

progresses, students must typically reflect more deeply on what types of responses they may need to make given a specific client concern or topic. For example, students may need to know how ask open-ended questions, how to summarize important themes for a client, or how to use specific interventions. VCBL could be constructed to allow more advanced students the opportunity to watch several interventions and decide which is most appropriate for a given helpee concern, for example. Further, the VCBL platform could allow students to share feedback with each other about their use of skills, which could further enhance their knowledge of helping skills.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

Further research using qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry is necessary to evaluate the utility of this application of VCBL. While the exploratory evaluation described here used an instructor developed, brief survey about student reactions to the experience, the topic merits more in-depth qualitative and quantitative examination. On the qualitative side, more sustained inquiry would enrich the snapshot of a student's perceptions at a single point in time. Additional survey and focus group data, possibly at the end of the semester so that students had the opportunity to reflect on the experience over time, could be embedded in a sustained qualitative inquiry framework that would enable more thick description, promote data triangulation. Such procedures would provide a more detailed picture for readers to judge the trustworthiness of our assertions about the utility of video case based learning. The data gathered could also be strengthened with a second survey assessing changing perceptions about the VCBL after its initial use. A focus group or interview component could be added to the evaluation, possibly at the end of the semester, to allow students to reflect on how the VCBL added to the totality of their training experience.



More established measures could be used quantitatively to assess important constructs such as students' self-efficacy and actual performance of helping skills before and after use of the VCBL. Larger samples of students across different classes would also be important to include in research. The semester in which this evaluation took place included students from several different, but related, disciplines (e.g., Counselor Education, Counseling Psychology, Higher Education Administration). Future research could examine if any aspects of the VCBL need to be discipline-specific. One obvious example would be matching particular types of cases to the student's area of study (e.g., vignettes involving elementary school students for school counseling).

In addition to evaluating the VCBL format presented in this manuscript, future research could also address the training needs of more advanced students. For example, the type of feedback offered to newer students about more fundamental skills is often very focused on a particular skill (using accurate reflections of content, identifying client feelings). More advanced students might need different feedback aimed at helping them make decisions about how and when to use more advanced skills, such as using self-disclosure with a helpee. Peer feedback and discussion could be more appropriate at this stage of development and be incorporated into the VCBL.

The VCBL described here seemed suited for the early stage of skill development as outlined in the research on novice learners conducted by Bransford and colleagues (2000), and future research could be aimed at examining how the VCBL case structure should change over the developmental cycle of the students. As they become more adept at helping skills, it is likely that the structure and presentation of cases would need to change, and each step in this process would need empirical study aimed at examining the most appropriate ways to use VCBL to help

graduate students maintain a healthy and realistic sense of self-efficacy while reflecting on their use of helping skills.

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