The Life Story Board: Pictorial Assessment Methods
for Canadian School Counsellors

Final Report
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Abstract

The “Life Story Board: pictorial assessment methods for Canadian school counsellors” project was to study the feasibility of Life Story Board (LSB) methods for use by school counsellors and social workers (SW) in the Winnipeg School Division (WSD). In particular, how the LSB may facilitate clinical work with newcomer immigrant students (see Appendix 1). The study period was January to June 2010. The methods, results, discussion and recommendations are presented here.

Background to the Research Project

A. Literature Review Re: Therapeutic Methods With Youth

There is an emerging literature on interventions for traumatized refugee children involving narratives, testimonials and story telling, distinct from clinical, psychometric study of psychiatric disorders such as post traumatic stress disorder.\(^1\) Methods that incorporate visual, task-based and experiential processes can be more effective for eliciting personal information from children than standard verbal interview or questionnaire methods, particularly in non-Western cultural contexts and disadvantaged community settings.\(^2\)

The Life Story Board builds on approaches used in counselling youth, such as family kinship diagrams (genograms) to elicit and organize family information, and help overcome reticence to share personal aspects of their lives.\(^3,4,5\) Genograms may help to develop solution-oriented interventions and to challenge children’s participation in maladaptive relationship or behaviour patterns.\(^6,7\) Life narrative work explores ‘who we are and how we form our lives’, in an active, continual process built on a relational matrix of home, school and community and other domains.\(^8,9\) In a therapeutic context this can: bring clearer perspective on personal experience and feelings; improve self-esteem; purge unhelpful burdens; enhance one’s sense of community and environmental support; and bring satisfaction in having shared one’s own story.\(^10,11\) Methods that elicit sensitive information in an engaging, non-threatening manner,\(^12\) and that provide efficient ways to record life narratives and help identify key influences in a child’s life are particularly valuable early in the therapeutic relationship.\(^13\)

The Life Story Board is a significant innovation in psychological methods. The process is able to follow the flow of conversation, and reflect aspects of the narrative back to the subject ‘storyteller’ in pictorial form, without the constraints and interference of questionnaires. The LSB is not a substitute for standardized psychometric or diagnostic instruments. But as a non-verbal mode to elicit and record rich personal information in a contextual way, it complements numerous disciplines such as cognitive and behavioural therapies CBT,\(^14\) integrative psychotherapy, play therapy, narrative therapy,\(^15\) family systems therapy\(^16,17\) and resiliency approaches.\(^18,19\)
B: Life Story Board Methods

The Life Story Board (LSB) is a table-top activity using a game mat and a toolkit of symbolic markers to construct a pictorial map or ‘storyboard’ of one’s life experience and circumstances. It was invented in the 1990s by the principal investigator (RC) as an alternative to conventional interview and questionnaire research approaches with war-affected children. Early versions of the LSB process were trialled in Sri Lanka, Uganda and with refugee children in Winnipeg.\textsuperscript{20,21} The co-construction of a Life Story Board engages the individual, verbally and visually, in a manual task to produce an ‘eco-map’ that portrays elements of lived experience: family and social networks, events, sources of physical and psychosocial risk, self-esteem, resiliency, and more.\textsuperscript{22}
Developing the LSB specifically for use by professional therapists and counsellors working with children and families began in 2008. At this time the company, Vidaview Information Systems Ltd, was established to manufacture the product, provide training and conduct related research.23

The idea to pilot-test the LSB in the Winnipeg school system arose from academic presentations on LSB methods and training workshops in November of 2008. Initial discussions were held in January 2009 with the director of the Child Guidance Centre (CGC), the department within the Winnipeg School Division (WSD) that provides clinical services to students.24 This led to the March 20th, 2009 presentation of the LSB to the CGC’s Refugee Advisory Committee. An agreement in principle was given to a research project to trial the LSB with school counsellors and social workers. Funding for the research was sought and secured from the University of Manitoba’s Research Grants Program (URGP).

C: Newcomer Immigrant Students in Manitoba Schools

The province of Manitoba, Canada (with a population of 1,222,000 in 2009), has an expanding immigrant program with the goal of receiving 20,000 immigrants annually by 2016.25 2007 saw the arrival of 11,000 newcomers to the province. While this program does address declining provincial population figures, it also seriously strains the capacity of schools to mediate adaptation to life in Canada for the youths arriving. In 2007/2008, 9,441 full-time students were enrolled in the English as an Additional Language (EAL) Support Program. This figure doubled that of 2004. The majority of these students live in Winnipeg, although there is a growing trend in smaller communities and rural Manitoba.26 In one inner city Winnipeg high school 60% of the student population come from a war-affected country.27 As part of reviewing Manitoba’s EAL program, the province’s ministries of Education and Immigration undertook a 2003-2004 survey and research study of adolescent and young adult newcomers from war-affected countries, including the challenges and opportunities facing the programs and services of Winnipeg school systems to address their specific needs.28

Education is a prime socializing activity for youth and a major determinant of how immigrants integrate into Canadian society.29 In addition to serving literacy and educational needs, the school is the main access point to prevention and treatment services for mental health problems.30 For children with significant experience of trauma and social upheaval, disclosing sensitive details to therapists or researchers may be particularly difficult due to literacy, cultural and trust-related barriers. The WSD is the largest of the six school divisions in Winnipeg. It covers a population of 675,100 (2009) and serves 33,000 of the 98,320 students in the city’s publicly funded school system.31 WSD runs 77 schools operated in four districts in central Winnipeg.
Objectives

The LSB study was the first formal assessment of a novel tool that works both as a process of engagement and as a means to elicit and record information. The Life Story Board tool may be suitable for clinical use among helping professionals across a wide spectrum of applications. For the purposes of this study the focus was to test the use of the LSB by school guidance staff with newcomer immigrant students. The expectation was that the LSB would have advantages over conventional approaches related to culturally diverse students who are referred for clinical services. The conceptual framework (Figure 1), based on the methodology of Peters et al., was used to guide the data collection and analysis.

Objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine the feasibility of using the LSB with immigrant newcomer youth during counselling sessions with school-based counsellors (How does it work in terms of time required, ease of use, comprehensibility, etc?);

2. Assess the utility of using the LSB as an assessment tool and in therapeutic counselling by school-based counsellors in sessions with immigrant newcomer youth (Does it help to disclose useful information and enable clinicians to formulate their assessment?);

3. Evaluate the quality of interaction (i.e. the tool’s effectiveness in facilitating rapport and relationship building between counsellor and student client).

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for systematic assessment of the Life Story Board in counselling with recent immigrant youth
Methods and Procedures

The intervention consisted of providing training to qualified school staff, refining the prototype LSB toolkit to the applied context, and eliciting LSB performance evaluations from the user and student subjects. With the decision by the Refugee Advisory Committee to proceed with the research, the CGC Area Service Director for WSD South District was chosen to support and assist in coordinating the study. Consequently, participants were drawn from the high schools and elementary schools of that particular school district.33

Eligible study participants (LSB users) were CGC counsellors and social workers with provincial clinical certification who had upper elementary or high school student caseloads that included immigrant newcomers. They also had to have the support of the CGC Area Service Director for release time to attend training and focus groups.34 While the original plan was to have four counsellors participate in the study, seven volunteered and thus took part. Of these seven counsellors, six were females and one was male; four were social workers (SW), two were guidance counsellors (GC) and one was a Bachelors of Social Work practicum student supervised by one of the social workers. All these participants completed consent forms before the study commenced.

An orientation session to prospective participants and senior CGC administrative staff was held on October 21st, 2010. That session presented the LSB methods and study protocol, reviewed informed consent procedures, and fielded questions. The study plan called for four counsellors to be trained to use the LSB with at least five students each (20 students in total).

Eligible students were between the ages of 8 and 18 years; children under the age of 8 years or with significant developmental delays were excluded from participating as the LSB requires a minimum level of cognitive development. Each LSB session with a student lasted between 40 minutes (the shortest) to 100 minutes (the longest), with an average duration of 65 minutes. Record keeping of the sessions included taking anonymous digital photographs of the completed story board layout created by the student.

Of the 20 students who took part in the study, 10 were females and 10 were males. They ranged in age between 12 and 18, with an average age of 15 years. Their countries of origin were Canada (eleven), Iraq (two), Somalia (two), Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Ukraine, Syria and Sudan. Students belonged to six different schools; five were from Kelvin High School, three from Earl Grey School, six from Grant Park High School, three from River Heights School, one from Churchill School, and two from Carpathia School. Nineteen students had one session and one student had two sessions. The reasons for having been referred to the school counsellor included the following: ongoing counselling(2); several issues; parents separated; abuse;
suicide; trauma; violence; chaotic life; depression; social support; self-referral. The 20 students were interviewed about their experience after they had their LSB session with the counsellor.

The project data collection arose from focus groups held with the school counsellors before, during, and after the trial LSB use period. The focus groups’ sessions were transcribed verbatim and analyzed following a series of guiding themes. In the final focus group, an anonymous six item questionnaire was given as a Chip Pouch Collection exercise. Questions were answered by secretly placing bingo chips (on a 0 to 10 score range) in an unmarked sock, with a different colour of chip used to answer each question. The socks were then collected at the end from all participants and the answers tallied.

Further, the school counsellors filled out feedback assessment forms after each Life Story Board session they conducted. Finally, the 20 students were briefly interviewed by the study research assistant 1-2 weeks after their LSB session; short responses to open-ended questions and a 6-item survey were completed. Mean scores and range of scores of the assessment forms were calculated, and the qualitative comments were tabulated and organized according to the main themes that emerged.

The study protocol, the forms and the instruments were approved by The University of Manitoba Health Research Ethics Board and the Winnipeg School Division Research Department (see appendix 1).

Results

The findings related to school counsellors are organized following each step of the project: baseline focus group, training, use of LSB, mid-point focus group, and final focus group. This is followed by summary scores and a listing of comments received as anecdotal feedback. Finally, the results from student feedback are presented.

1. Baseline Focus Group

The initial focus group (FG) session took place with the seven participants and three members of the research team. At the start of the session, the purpose of the WSD/LSB project was outlined, and it was explained that this was the first of three FGs that would take place over the six month study period. Open-ended questions about the participants’ background, work and caseload led to discussion and comments. Subsequently, the Life Story Board was presented, including guidelines for how it may assist school SWs and GCs with student clients. The LSB session was followed with descriptions of the study methodology, the expected number of LSB sessions, the type of information to be collected, and so on.

The group had considerable professional experience totalling 110 years among the seven (18 years on average, and ranging from 10 to 32); 65% of those years working in the school system.
and 35% with other agencies such as child/family services, residential, etc. The SWs were involved in more classroom interactions and groups, while the counsellors had more individual sessions with students. There was a range from half-time to full-time. One of the SW was working as a Refugee Advisor, a term position Educational Assistant with transition classes. Newer WSD staff had greater caseload challenges. For half of the group their work was split across four or five different schools and they typically saw students once only. Caseloads for those dedicated to one school were more stable and included non-referred students (e.g. ‘drop-ins’ and through peer networks). The latter, more informal, process had lighter reporting obligations. Time with students ranged from 10 minute check-ins up to 30 - 40 minutes as needed. Seldom did they meet with students for over an hour.

All were familiar with newcomer immigrant challenges, and most had received professional development in this area, largely through personal initiative but with some in-servicing. Nonetheless, most had caseloads with less than 10% newcomer students, compared to 25-40% First Nations or 60-70% “mainstream”. In contrast the SW Refugee Advisor’s work was exclusively with newcomers. In schools with EAL and Transition Programs, other staff (e.g. resource teachers and educational assistants) tended to have closer personal interaction than CGC clinicians. Clinical tools typically used by SWs were genogram diagrams, drawing, painting and having toys available. Some students would write stories that were springboards for discussion. Counsellors considered that making students feel welcome and comfortable was important and at times challenging.

Common reasons to be asked to meet with a newcomer immigrant student included, in no particular order: abuse in the home; non-attendance; law enforcement; gang involvement; suicidal cases; illiteracy, and behavioural issues.

According to the SWs their sources of information about students was limited and sometimes of dubious accuracy. They mentioned ‘not having a complete understanding of the cultures’. Using third party translators from agencies could be controversial, for instance, despite speaking the same language as the student there could be ethnic political issues, as well as it being somewhat risky to obtain someone from an agency. According to the focus group participants, the services from settlement organizations were generally poor and child welfare services had protracted waiting lists - “eventually is the key word”. In contrast, interactions with police during school sessions and with caseworkers appeared to be positive. The focus group indicated that students may hold some suspicions about social workers and are wary of what is written down. Furthermore, there is a lot of documentation and paper work.
2. Training

One school counsellor opted to drop out after the first day of training. The main reason was the time commitment involved. This individual felt that the LSB was complex and would be too time-consuming to learn to use confidently.

Two non-consecutive days of workshop training were held two weeks apart (November 27 and December 14, 2009) (See Appendix). In the first day the background to LSB methods was presented, the toolkits and instruction manual were handed out, and a brief orientation to the various elements in the sets was provided. In the afternoon participants paired up to perform a LSB session. This was followed by discussions and an assignment to brainstorm items for LSB elements sets (e.g. feelings, behaviour, and activities) relevant to their practice as school counsellors, and to practice on friends and family. On the second day, their suggested items for the elements sets were collected and categorized. Based on this, revised marker sets were produced and added to their toolkits, the Instruction Manual was revised, and three instructional video clips were prepared. A second LSB practice session was held so every participant had the experience of being a subject and of leading as a guide. Study materials, for instance the revised parental consent form and session feedback forms, were reviewed and likely scenarios and issues of comfort and safety were discussed. At the participants’ request a further session was held on January 10, 2010 for a demonstration of a full-length LSB session. This session was attended by four of the six participants.

3. LSB Study Period- February to June 2010

The participants started using the LSB toolkits by late January. Use began slowly due to exams and the February break. Also, they were required to get signed parental consent forms before holding a session. This proved to be onerous as students were slow to bring signed forms back, many parents did not speak English, and the request to give approval raised concerns. Ethics approval was subsequently granted to simplify the process by allowing verbal telephone consent rather than written. By contrast, the Refugee Education Assistant SW in the transitional class presented the LSB to the whole class and distributed consent forms to many volunteers. This method worked better. The study goal was to gather feedback on a total of 20 LSB sessions with students. This was achieved with five LSB users (one SW was paired with the BSW practicum student).

4. Mid-point Focus Group

The mid-point focus group was held on March 26, 2010 and was attended by three of the six participating counsellors. We subsequently interviewed the other three so as to hear from all about their experience. Among the six participants, all but one had used the LSB at least once, and one had used it three times. Of the five that had used it thus far all found the LSB quite
intriguing and reported interesting outcomes. Some had not seen the online video training clips because of the WSD internet security limitations, and it was now some months since the workshop and demonstration. Three expressed feeling tentative and not yet confident in their use. Among the reasons was their unfamiliarity with the many element sets in the toolkit, making the search for specific markers in the many compartments time-consuming and distracting from their focus on the student. In contrast, two were quite comfortable with the process. Both had had past experience with interactive tools used by international humanitarian agencies and in play therapy.

The mid-point evaluation identified issues to address and led to suggestions. For the slow return of signed parental consent forms, the revised verbal consent was an option. For those frustrated by the many element pieces in the toolkit, the suggestion was given to write or draw free hand on the larger blank cards instead of looking for the exact marker. The FG session was confidence-building overall, and all felt that they could complete their contribution to the study goal of a total of 20 sessions (four each).

5. Final Focus Group

The final focus group was held on May 31, 2010 with four participants. The two that were not able to attend were interviewed separately before the school year ended at the end of June.

Feedback related to the training given was for the LSB to be introduced at a lighter level first, and that they would learn further through improvising. Initial demonstrations and simulations in the training were strongly favoured over ‘explaining all the details’.

Becoming comfortable with the set first through informal practice would help. The toolkit is complex and having an organized set-up to start a session is important. As learners, some study group participants found that the ‘busyness’ of the toolkit detracted from their attention on the student. Conversely, several noted that looking for the toolkit pieces was interactive, engaging and fun to share, particularly with more non-verbal students. They anticipated that the more compact magnetic set planned for commercial release would be a considerable improvement over the non-magnetic prototype used in the study.

They all found the LSB intriguing, and remarked about interesting insights into the students that the verbal and non-verbal process around the storyboard opened. They noted that students liked how the LSB offered a casual conversational mode to talk about themselves and their relationships, and also that some elements in the kit, for example the mental health markers, feeling charts, and risk and resource chips, were catalysts to evoke or bring up sensitive issues in a non-threatening way for exploration. They felt their clinical training was important for responsible LSB use, given this potential for disclosure of serious life aspects.
Participants felt session times would improve as they mastered the LSB toolkit; and that use with a given student would pay off in subsequent sessions when the student is also familiar with the process, thus becoming more focused and time efficient. They unanimously felt the LSB had promising clinical value and were excited to have it in their repertoire now. They saw how the LSB could be integrated into routine practice and all intended to continue using it. While most felt that the sessions were a bit lengthy at around one hour, several saw using the tool over a series of sessions with different focuses, for instance past and present family, current peer relationships, and personal and school behaviour issues. Adopting the LSB for regular use depended on their various responsibilities and caseloads, and may require re-considering scheduling arrangements in some settings.

Concluding the final FG was the Chip Pouch Collection activity that served as an anonymous survey to score aspects of the LSB as shown in the table below. Counsellors on average rated the helpfulness of the LSB to develop trust and relationship, and to facilitate therapy very high (8.4). Slightly lower, but still quite high, they found it helpful as an information gathering tool (7.6). They also felt it was relatively comfortable to use the LSB (7). They estimated that more than half of their peers across the Canadian school system would wish to use it as a clinical tool “if they knew about and could acquire the LSB”.

**Life Story Board User Chip Pouch Questionnaire Results (N=6)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Scale (0- 10)</th>
<th>Mean score (range)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How comfortable do you now feel to use the LSB?</td>
<td>Poorly (0) to very well (10)</td>
<td>7 (6-8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How helpful is LSB as an information gathering tool in school guidance work?</td>
<td>Not at all (0) to the best (10)</td>
<td>7.8 (6-9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How helpful is LSB process to develop trust, relationship and facilitate therapy?</td>
<td>Not at all (0) to the best (10)</td>
<td>8.5 (7-10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What % of school C/SWs across Canada would want to have and use LSB?</td>
<td>0 (0) to -100% (10)</td>
<td>62.5 % (20-90%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Considering what you know about the students you see, how well is the school system handling the challenge?</td>
<td>Poorly (0) to very well (10)</td>
<td>5.5 (4-6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How would you rate your experience as a participant in this research project?</td>
<td>Poor (0) to fantastic (10)</td>
<td>7.5 (6-9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. LSB Session Results: Clinician Report

Reported session lengths ranged from 40-100 minutes, averaging 64 minutes. The information from the feedback forms suggested high scores on most aspects of the LSB session. The highest was the engagement of the student (4.57). The LSB helped to organize information and think systematically (4.36); helped with communication (4.21); was generally comfortable to use (4.21); it was understood (4.14); and facilitated disclosure of personal/sensitive information (4.14). The time efficiency of the LSB process received middle scores, suggesting that it may have taken longer than counsellors would prefer.

a. LSB Session Feedback Forms Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“How was the LSB session in these aspects?”</th>
<th>1 = poor, 5 = excellent Mean (range)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i. Communication</td>
<td>4.21 (3-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. The LSB process was understood/it made sense</td>
<td>4.14 (3-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. General comfort and ease of use</td>
<td>4.21 (3-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. Facilitated disclosure of personal/sensitive information</td>
<td>4.14 (2-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. The process engaged the student</td>
<td>4.57 (4-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi. Helped organize information and think systematically</td>
<td>4.36 (4-5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vii. Was LSB process time- efficient to elicit information?</td>
<td>3.36 (2-4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b. Qualitative Feedback from School Counsellor Session Forms

The quotes below are the answers to the question:
“What aspect of the LSB process helped, or hindered the session?”

Helped:
- Many different markers available. The board itself helps to organize story.
- The session was great. The student really enjoyed it. She was open to discussing family details and make-up that we hadn’t had the opportunity to explore. There are some mental health issues - I showed her the sheet for those and she gave more details. Great!
• The hollow or secret zone allowed her the respect for me not to pry, but allowed her to put chips down without needing to explain. It was clear that she felt safe. And when asked if we could discuss this at a later date she agreed.

• Organized all the members of his family, where he lived, and those pieces of his life which are difficult to visualize just by talking. It helped me to ask questions I may not otherwise ask.

• I have known this student for three years and I learned many new things that I have wondered about or speculated but never had the avenue to ask these questions or have these issues raised before now.

• Having the family event and relationship cards made clear the dynamics and pieces to her life that otherwise would have seemed complicated and hard to keep details straight. The visual was helpful to refer to and get clarification or to expand on certain events or relationship.

• The student really liked using the chips that he could draw on himself to represent what he wanted to convey.

• This student benefits from working with her hands. In this way she was able to remain involved in conversation for longer than she usually would have. Green and Yellow chips helped provide some insight into what she really thinks/feels.

• Seems the number of moves and times in sheet usually was very powerful. When she read the list mental health markers was able to disclose much important information regarding herself and her parents. Systematic way of talking about her life was helpful as she has trouble clearly describing things.

• Seeing the lists seemed to trigger some memories - in this way new information was disclosed.

• The cards with the relationship between family members really help clarify issues. Very systematic, visual, was quite helpful.

• The questions facilitated greater disclosure than previous sessions.

• The systematic format of the board helped with the understanding of the student’s story. It facilitated the session immensely.
1. Hindered:
   - Just need more exposure to using the board. Practice makes perfect.
   - Unfortunately we were interrupted numerous times and had to finish earlier than anticipated. School setting is difficult at times.
   - There were too many symbols and pieces that initially were overwhelming. Even with my direction it was beneficial to not take out many of the pieces to complicate things or stop her flow of talking and my ability to listen attentively.
   - Because I felt that I had so much to cover in a short time, it was difficult to go more in-depth in areas that we touched upon I felt rushed and the closure wasn’t as evident.
   - The pieces with drawing on them were too confusing for him; we did not use them much at all.
   - She has a short attention span so didn’t want to hear about what the various markers represented. She doesn’t like to read, so also didn’t want to look at the sheets that list what the markers mean. We ended up learning this and keeping things simple.
   - She did not like to work with the clay. Made a “blob” for her card. Was worried about the clay. We could have benefitted from more time but as she needed to go to her next class, we decided to use the LSB again.
   - I wasn’t familiar with all of the pieces. This would possibly help when I am more familiar. I think it would have been more effective with this student if used when I started working with him but by this time he had already told me much of his story.
   - Complicated. It was difficult to remember and find all the pieces.

7. LSB Sessions: Student Follow-Up

The interview focused on forms consisting of five questions (see appendix for details).

1. How did the Life Story Board session go?
   a. What did you like about the session?
   b. What did you not like about the session?
   c. Did the LSB activity help the session? If so, how?
   d. Did the LSB activity hinder the session? If so, how?

2. For a counselling session would you prefer (or not) to use the Life Story Board?
3. Did you have any difficulties afterwards with emotions or personal reactions because of the Life Story Board activity? (nightmares, negative thinking, etc.)

4. Overall, how helpful or not was the Life Story Board?

All but 2 of the 20 students liked the LSB, and many were enthusiastic about how it “helped to see my life” and that “it was easier to talk with it”; “I could visually see it, it’s not just in my head”. Six expressed not liking some aspects of the session in general, for instance having to talk about family, or think about the past, as well as a few technical aspects such as, “a bit confusing with so many pieces”, and, “not a lot of detail about relationships”. Overall, more than 80% felt the LSB helped in the session and none felt it hindered. None of the students reported adverse effects from the LSB session, while many remarked about enduring thoughts. Some described talking to others about the experience, while for others it was a more private experience.

The following are examples of answers from the students to the questions:

**Did the LSB activity help the session? If so, how?**

- “More things come to my mind to talk about”. “It is easier to memorize things about life because it is on the board” “Basically I can see my life on it.”
- “It is better than talking, better using hands and art.”
- “It is good to talk using LSB, you can tell more things.”
- “I don’t talk much about myself but with the LSB I told everything.”
- “It helped me to remember, it helped to see what I did.”
- “I realized how my life turn around.” “I remembered every day the LSB.”
- “I could see better about my family, outside the school and thoughts; if I have the opportunity to use it again I will explain my thoughts.” “It described more than you think, I like LSB.”
- “Both counsellor and student get better understanding, you go step by step”
- “Yes, instead of talking general things we talked more specific.”
- “Yes, very much. Because for example you see where you lived so, then, you know what are you talking about.”
- “It helps to relief things I never talk about.”
- “It helps me. I didn’t know all the English but looking at the sheets it helped me to express.”
• “Yes, you can see parts of your life you don’t usually see.”
• “Yes, we went over things that we didn’t cover before.”
• “With the LSB you can see your life. I like LSB. I had so many memories and want to fill it out but didn’t have time. It is easier to express feelings, and how the life goes.”

The post-LSB student survey suggested it was a good experience for them. Particularly relevant was the almost excellent rating that the LSB helped them share personal or sensitive information. The issue of general comfort during the session was the only item close to average.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post-LSB Student Survey (n=20)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do you rate your experience with the LSB in the following areas?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1=poor, 3= average, 5=excellent)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How is the LSB as a tool to help a counsellor to get a picture of a person like you?</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. General comfort during the session</td>
<td>3.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Helps me share personal or sensitive information</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Keeps me interested in the counselling process</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Helps me to see my life situation in a helpful way</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. There was enough time in the LSB session</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion and Conclusion

Overall, the results of the study were very positive in relation to the feasibility and usefulness of the LSB as a tool for school counsellors working with refugee and immigrant students. As well, the study provided useful information that will help to enhance the tool components, the process of its use, and the training of users.

In relation to the LSB process, there were some early concerns expressed about its apparent complexity and that it would be too time-consuming. Nonetheless, the experience of most counsellors suggested that this was not the case. Some experienced feeling tentative and not yet confident in its use, especially during the initial stages. In particular their unfamiliarity with the many elements in the toolkit made the process somewhat time-consuming and distracting.
However, most felt that more guidance and familiarity using the tool would minimize these constraints. And even with these concerns, they believed that the LSB helped the sessions.

Specific to the training process, the counsellors recommended that the LSB be introduced at a lighter level first and that they be able to learn more through improvising. They particularly favoured demonstrations and simulations rather than explanation of all the granular details in the initial training sessions.

The school counsellors mentioned during the initial focus group that their sources of information about students were limited and sometimes of dubious accuracy, and that they were also hindered by their own limited understanding of different cultures. Consequently, a tool that assists in these regards would be of considerable value. Their experience with the LSB sessions they led suggested that in fact the tool did assist with rapport, communication and information, as the counsellors gave high scores to most aspects of the process. As well, it helped them to communicate with youth who usually speak very little, and those with limited English language abilities.

The focus group rated the LSB process highest on its ability to engage the students, followed by its use in helping to organize information and think systematically, and assist communication. They appreciated how the LSB facilitated disclosure of personal and/or sensitive information; the roles of the hollow zone and secret markers were highlighted in this regard. They also noted how the tool helped to visually organize all members of the student’s family, where they lived, and so on, which is usually difficult to understand and retain from verbal means alone.

As important and promising is the fact that 90% of the students liked the LSB. Most were enthusiastic about how it helped them to see their lives, and how it made talking about things easier. Aspects of the LSB session that some expressed not liking were consistent with normal experiences of resistance that occur during counselling sessions, such as having to talk about family or think of unpleasant things about their past. Some also mentioned that so many pieces in the set were confusing. Positive aspects they mentioned included that more things came up in their mind to talk about; that it was better than just talking; that it helped them remember and notice how things had changed in their life; that they could see their families better; that it helped to “relief” things that they had never talked about, and so on.

As well, the post-LSB student survey suggested it was a good experience for them. The scores indicated that it did help them to share personal and or sensitive information. The issue of general comfort during the session was the only item that had an average score. Overall, the scores and comments provided by the students are a strong confirmation that the LSB process appears to contribute to building trust, facilitating rapport and communication, and providing valuable information.
With regards to the use of the LSB in the school context, several issues were identified. All counsellors thought that the tool has promising clinical value and were excited to have it in their repertoire (and all intended to continue using it). They all considered that the LSB could be integrated into routine practice. While most felt that the sessions were somewhat lengthy, several saw how it could be used over a series of sessions, each done with a different focus. Most counsellors indicated that being able to adopt the LSB for regular use depended on their various responsibilities and case loads. In some settings. Optimum use would call for considering modifications in scheduling arrangements and ways LSB methods can be integrated into mainstream clinical and counselling functions.

Finally, with respect to the research goal of furthering development of LSB methods, the feedback from the study project was highly useful in several areas. Participants’ observations and suggestions about the applicability of certain toolkit elements, and their reported challenges with the LSB process itself have all informed and advanced our development of the first edition release for commercial sale to professional clinicians anticipated for early 2011. For instance, revisions to the commercial edition LSB include features such as a smaller, foldable and magnet-receptive board, along with magnetic palettes for organizing and displaying the marker sets, that make it significantly easier and more comfortable to use than the prototype used in the study. Refinements have also been made to the marker sets themselves, to enhance their relevance and broaden their applicability.

Additionally, feedback about the training workshop format, other instructional resources, and the learning curve necessary to become comfortable with using the LSB clinically was all very informative. This information will contribute substantially to the design and development of the LSB training systems for individual therapists, programs, agencies and institutions, such as school districts that adopt LSB methods with in-house training capacity.

A detailed report of the research project and its results will be prepared both for publication in a major Canadian professional journal with high readership among school counsellors, and for presentation at the National Conference of the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association in May 2011.

In conclusion, the study demonstrated that Life Story Board methods have considerable merit in the hands of school counsellors and social workers, in particular when used with newcomer youth. More generally, the visual, participatory process facilitated rapport with non-verbal students, opened opportunities to build trust, and elicited useful information. The LSB is well suited for assessment and therapeutic interventions common to school clinicians.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to thank to the various parties who helped make this project possible: University of Manitoba University Research Grant Program; the Winnipeg School Division, Dushant Persaud, Jane Friesen, Olga Wyshnowsky, the study participants and students; and the extended research team, including Linda Diffey (CAHR/CAHE research associate), Kerstin Roger, Dawn Stewart (CAHR).

5 Altshuler ibid
23 Vidaview Information Systems Ltd, www.vidaview.ca; University of Manitoba has part equity
24 Discipline specific services listed among the CGC services and functions include:
1. Psychology: Assessment (cognitive/ emotional/ social/ behavioural); Consultation – student/family/program/school; Counselling, Intervention – individual/group; Crisis Intervention; Support – family/school/community; Inter-Agency Liaison (Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre, Child and Family Services, Children’s Special Services, Child Protection, Medical, etc.); Advocacy (e.g. increased supports, student programming needs, etc.), and In-servicing;
2. Social Work: Assessment (student in relation to family/school/community); Consultation – individual/family/school, Counselling- Family/parent intervention, Crisis Intervention, Support – education to family/school/community, Inter-Agency Liaison (referral to counseling, Child Protection, family therapy, etc.), Advocacy (e.g. student safety, family support services, etc.);
3. Speech/ Language Pathology, and
4. Audiology (screening, consultation, intervention, support etc. [accessed July 26, 2010 from http://www.wsd1.org/childguidance/service_functions.htm ]
WSD South District contains 19 schools comprised of thirteen nursery to grade 6 schools; one Nursery to grade 8; one grade 7-8; three junior/senior high schools (7-12); and one high school (9-12).

The study participant recruitment poster for eligible school counsellors and social workers is attached (Appendix 2).

The Chip Pouch Game was invented for the LSB pilot tests conducted in Northern Uganda in collaboration with War Child Canada. Ref: Rob Chase, 2007, ‘Pilot testing Life Story Board methods with War Child Canada in Northern Uganda http://vidaview.ca/publications/

Instructional videogoclips are posted on the VidaView website: http://vidaview.ca/training/instructional-video-clips/

The final magnetized version of the toolkit will have marker sets easily displayed on palettes instead of piled in small boxes.

The Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy (CJCP) is the official journal of the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA), which holds their annual conference May 17-20, 2011 in Ottawa.
Appendix 1
“What is Life Story Board?” brochure
The Life Story Board: pictorial assessment methods for Canadian school counsellors.

The Life Story Board

The Life Story Board

Will not ask about personal details of your life story or what was discussed with the guidance counsellor in your sessions in a way that will identify you.

Will not have access to the confidential information of the counsellor's notes: according to school policy, these are kept separate from the academic record of the student.

More information?

Please contact:

Maria Fernanda Medina (LSB study coordinator)
email: mafemedina@mts.net
phone: 275-7613

Or

Dr. Rob Chase (Principal Investigator)
email: mamil@schmil@mil&t.net
Maria Fernanda Medina (LSB study coordinator)

Need more information?

The academic record of the student.

to school policy, these are kept separate from information of the counsellor's notes: according to the confidential

\textbullet \quad \text{Will not have access to the confidential}

\textbullet \quad \text{Will not ask about personal details of your life story or what was discussed with the guidance counsellor in your sessions in a way that will identify you.}
What is the Life Story Board?

Some people have difficulty talking about their life. The Life Story Board is an activity using a large game board with sets of cards and markers that help someone talk about their life in a picture.

The Life Story Board is made for use by counsellors, social workers and other health and social professionals.

What are we trying to do?

Researchers at the University of Manitoba developed the Life Story Board. We are working with the Winnipeg School Division’s Child Guidance Centre to see whether the Life Story Board can help counsellors better understand the life situation of a youth, particularly when language, culture or difficult experiences make it difficult to "put into words" how it works.

What are we doing?

Researchers, social workers and other health and social professionals. The Life Story Board is made for use by counsellors, social workers and other health and social professionals.

How are we using the Life Story Board?

Over a 5 month period (January-May 2010), researchers have been trained by the researchers. In the Winnipeg School Division, six counsellors will use the Life Story Board with some of the newcomer students to see how it works.

The counsellor:

Will take a photograph of your Life Story Board — you will be given a copy — but this will not be shared with the researchers.

Will complete information forms that do not disclose your personal identity or details about your life story.

The researcher:

Will meet with you after the sessions to ask you how you feel about the activity and whether you found it helpful.

Will complete information forms that do not disclose your personal identity or details about your life story.

Please turn over.
Appendix 2
Parental Consent Form
PARENTAL INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: “The Life Story Board: pictorial assessment methods for Canadian school counsellors”

Researchers: Robert Chase MD, Department of Community Health Sciences, University of Manitoba
Phone: 789-3885

Javier Mignone PhD, Faculty of Human Ecology, University of Manitoba
Phone: 474-8065

Your child has been asked to participate in a research study at school. Please take your time to review this consent form. The study coordinator will be available by phone to discuss any questions you may have. This consent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask the study coordinator to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand.

Purpose of Study
Researchers at the University of Manitoba have developed a new way for someone to talk about their life using an activity called the Life Story Board. The purpose of the research is to study how the Life Story Board may help school counsellors understand and help students who may have difficulties talking about their life situation.

Study procedures
Your child has been referred to the guidance counsellor at school. The school counsellor thinks the Life Story Board will help, and your child is interested.

- The Life Story Board activity will take place in the counsellor’s office at school. A session takes one to two hours.
- About a week after the session, the study coordinator will meet with your child for a short (approximately 20 minute) interview to find out how they felt about the Life Story Board session.

The researchers will hold group meetings called Focus Groups with the school guidance counsellors about how well the Life Story Board helped them during counselling sessions, and about how to improve the Life Story Board activity. The researchers will not ask about specific personal details in the student’s life situations.

The study coordinator will not ask your child about personal life information. This interview will be kept confidential, and your child’s name will not be used in any reports.
**Benefits and Risks**
This study will give the researchers and school counsellors useful information to help students.

Some children may become emotionally upset speaking about negative experiences or personal issues with the counsellor. We hope the Life Story Board will help in this process but this may still happen. The counsellor can help them with any discomfort they may have during the session.

**Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal from the Study**
Your decision to have your child take part in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or you may withdraw your child from the study at any time. Your child may also withdraw at any time if they so wish. The decision not to participate will not affect your child’s care at the school.

You are not waiving any of your legal rights by signing this consent form nor releasing the investigators from their legal and professional responsibilities.

**Compensation for participation**
For meeting with the study coordinator and completing the short interview your child will receive a $25 gift certificate.

**Confidentiality**
Information gathered in this research study may be published or presented in public forums, however your child’s name and any identifying information will not be used. Any excerpts from interviews will not make reference to specific participants. Despite efforts to keep your personal information confidential, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law.

The nature of focus groups prevents absolute confidentiality, despite researcher requests for such privacy and confidentiality. When we interview the school counsellors in a group, we will remind them that anything shared in the group is to remain confidential, and not to share any personal information about their students. The group meetings will be audiotaped; the tapes will be destroyed on completion of the project in one year (by the Fall 2010).

Individual interviews with your child will involve completing a form without use of their name and the data will be entered into a computer for analysis. Only the research staff will have access to this data which will be kept in a locked secure area.

The University of Manitoba Health Research Ethics Board may review records related to the study for quality assurance purposes.

**Questions**
You are free to ask any questions that you may have about the study. Please feel free to contact the research team:
Maria Fernanda Medina (study coordinator) phone: 275-7613 or email: mafemedina@mts.net
Dr. Rob Chase, (principal investigator) phone: 789-3885 or email: chaser@cc.umanitoba.ca,

For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact The University of Manitoba, Bannatyne Campus Research Ethics Board Office at (204) 789-3389

Do not sign this consent form unless you have had a chance to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers to all of your questions.
Statement of Consent

I have read this consent form. I have had the opportunity to discuss this research study with Dr. Rob Chase’s study staff. I have had my questions answered in a language I understand. I give my consent for my child to participate in the study.

Student’s Printed Name: __________________________________________

Parent’s signature __________________________ Date __________________
(____/____/____)
Parent’s printed name: __________________________

OR Alternative (for verbal consent by telephone)

I, the undersigned, have fully explained the relevant details of this research study to the participant named above in a telephone conversation and believe that the participant has understood and has knowingly given their consent.

Printed Name: __________________________________________

Position: Research Coordinator / Principal Investigator / Counsellor [circle]

Signature: __________________________________________
Appendix 3A: LSB Session Form for Counsellor
Life Story Board - Session Feedback Form

Client Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>Country or origin Grade attending</th>
<th>Reason for referral/presenting:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Time to complete: _____ minutes.
2. Was there a translator involved in the session? ____Yes ___ No
   If yes, how did this influence the session?

3. How well could the student communicate verbally? [very poor] 1 2 3 4 5 [very well]
   Comments:

4. For this session, rate how well the LSB functioned in the following areas (1 = poor, 5 = excellent):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i. The student could understand the LSB process, it made sense.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. General comfort and ease of use during the session</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. How it facilitated disclosure of personal / sensitive information.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iv. How the LSB process engaged the student</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. How it helped organize information and think systematically.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vi. How time-efficient was the LSB process to elicit information</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. How did the LSB work to help you achieve your objectives of the session, or not?
6. What aspect of the LSB process helped, or hindered the session?

Helped:

Hindered:

7. Was there any critical incident or other unanticipated issue that affected the session?


8. Were there any modifications to the Life Story Board toolkit or the LSB session process that would have assisted you in your clinical objectives working with the student?

A. Suggestions for LSB toolkit (items or recording format)

B. Suggestions for LSB session process:

Thank you
Appendix 3B: LSB Session Form for Student
Life Story Board - Student Feedback Form

One-on-one interview approx two weeks after LSB session
Conducted by Technical Assistant MA

Date: _____________________________

How many LSB sessions did you have?

How were they?

Did you have any difficulties, emotional or personal that troubled you after the sessions?
Like nightmares, negative thinking, etc.

How well the LSB functioned in the following areas (1 = poor, 5 = excellent):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Sort of</th>
<th>Yes, very much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General ease of use during the session</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped me talk about things that are personal or sensitive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped me to see my life story in a helpful way</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was engaged in the process</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency in eliciting information within alloted time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was able to understand the LSB process</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Open-ended questions, short answer:

1. What did you like about the session?

2. What did you not like about the Sessions?

3. Overall did you find using the LSB helpful”

4. How would you compare it to a session with the counsellor without the ISB

5. Did some aspect of the LSB process hinder the session?
Appendix 3C: Chip Pouch Collection (Final Focus Group Exercise)
**Chip Pouch Collection: WSB Life Story Board Users Scoring**

**Instructions:** 6 questions, 6 colours of chips. Each one gets a mixed scoop of chips on a cloth, they sort them into colours and use each one in sequence to answer question, by secretly tucking into an unmarked sock their chosen number of chips.

CIRCLE YOUR ANSWER, 0 TO 10

1. How comfortable do you now feel to use the LSB?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poorly</th>
<th>not well</th>
<th>OK</th>
<th>fairly well</th>
<th>very well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - + - + - + + - 5 - + - + + + + 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Looking ahead to a smaller, magnetic LSB toolkit, and from your perspective as a school counsellor or social worker in a large Canadian city…”

2. ...how helpful is the LSB as an information gathering process for the kind of assessment and understanding the child guidance / school system should have?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>somewhat</th>
<th>helpful</th>
<th>very</th>
<th>the best</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - + - + - + - + - 5 - + - + + + + 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. ...how helpful is the LSB as a process to develop trust, relationship and to facilitate therapy?

(as per Q 2)

4. ...how useful is the LSB as a tool for social work / school counsellors? What percentage across Canada do you think would want to have and use the LSB?

| 0 - 10% - 20% - 30% - 40% - 50% - 60% - 70% - 80% - 90% - 100% |

5. Considering the kinds of issues, problems and strengths you see in the students you serve, how well do you feel the school system is handling them?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poorly</th>
<th>not well</th>
<th>OK</th>
<th>fairly well</th>
<th>very well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - + - + - + - + - 5 - + - + + + + 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. How would you rate your experience as a participant in this research project?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>frustrating</th>
<th>OK</th>
<th>enjoyable</th>
<th>fantastic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - + - + - + - + - 5 - + - + + + + 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>