This article describes an innovative play board and kit called the Vidaview Life Story Board (LSB) that combines features of the genogram, eco-map, and timeline for use with therapy clients. The goal of this study was to explore and understand the experience of clients and therapists during and after therapy sessions using the LSB, with particular focus on the disclosure of difficult life events. The LSB is a visual interview tool that uses a colorful board, sets of cards, markers, and a notation system to construct a multidimensional view of a person's life situation. The board facilitates the "translation" of narrative life stories into a "life-scape representation" through a process of co-construction between the client and the therapist. Methods: The study took place in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, in 2013 and involved the staff of a counseling program in a non-profit community health center that provides services to inner city residents. Clients were mostly newcomer Canadians, First Nations, and Métis. The study collected qualitative data.
Findings: Clients created a visual representation of their difficult life events and experiences in an organized way in a process of co-construction with the therapists, achieving effective communication. Its contrast to other visual methods used in psychotherapy was reviewed. The LSB facilitated clients’ disclosure and gave them personal relief by depicting a number of factors that affected their lives. However, further research with a larger number of participants is required to better understand the process by which the LSB, as a visual tool, assists clients and therapists during sessions.

Visual tools and modalities are diversely used by therapists and counselors, be it a handy note pad or whiteboard to sketch and record on in client sessions, or graphic frameworks that inform and guide the process of assessment and therapy. Graphic representation of a client’s experience has long been acknowledged as an invaluable therapeutic tool. For instance, the eco-map introduced by Hartman (1995) in 1978 shows linkages of self and family to social systems of informal and formal supports, using a family systems or social ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) which has been variously adapted by Carpenter-Aeby, Aeby, & Boyd (2007) and Baumgartner and Buchanan (2010). Butler (2008) notes the introduction of the family diagram by Murray Bowen in the 1950s, which later evolved into the genogram, “a schematic diagram of the three-generational family relationship system.”

The family genogram may be the most widely used graphic device and is applied across health and social services as a schematic to record family, health, and social information, following McGoldrick, Gerson, and Petry (2008) as a platform and activity process for counseling therapeutic work. Dunn and Levitt (2000) note the trend in the specialization of genogram use to specific populations, issues, or presenting problems and its adaptation to different theoretical orientations, for instance, solution-oriented (Kuehl, 1996), cultural (Riagazio-DiGilio, Ivey, Grady, & Kunkler-Peck, 2005; Warde, 2012), and spiritual genograms (Hodge & Limb, 2010; Kuehl, 1996). They differentiate between its use as primarily an information-gathering tool to organize data and track relationships, and the genogram as an approach in mutually collaborative, process-oriented explorations that foster an empathic relationship and support the telling of stories suited to social constructionist approaches. As well, Malchiodi (2013; 2015) describes a range of trauma-informed expressive, experiential, and body-based creative art techniques with children and youth that enable them to play, speak, draw, or write about their life events. In summary, there is substantial evidence that visual tools can facilitate elicitation of a client’s life experiences to give form to some intangible process, which may or may not include verbal articulation.

This article examines a new visual tool, the Vidaview Life Story Board (LSB), with the goal of exploring and understanding the experience of clients and therapists during and after therapy sessions using the LSB, with particular focus on the disclosure of difficult life events. The LSB is a magnet-receptive kit with a color-
The Life Story Board

ful play board, sets of cards, markers, and a flexible notation system to visually represent a person’s life situation, which can include personal, family, relational, and community aspects. It facilitates the “translation” of conversation and narrative life stories into a visual “life-scape” in a process of co-construction between the visual markers, the “subject,” and the “listener/observer,” be this a counselor, therapist, or researcher.

The LSB was developed by Robert Chase (2008) starting in 1995 initially by extending the logic of the genogram (McGoldrick et al., 2008) into a physical board game used in an expressive arts program in Sri Lanka with war-affected children (Chase, 2000). LSB methods were trialed with children in various settings in developing countries (Chase, 2008) as an assessment tool for humanitarian non-government organizations to use in mental health and psychosocial programs. The first study in a North American setting considered the feasibility of the LSB as a tool for school counselors in Winnipeg schools with newcomer students (Chase, Medina, & Mignone, 2012). In the brief post-session interviews, students commented that the non-verbal process made it easier to express and share difficult life situations.

The study goal was to explore and understand the experience of clients and therapists during and after therapy sessions using the LSB, with particular focus on the disclosure of difficult life events. The research questions were: (1) How do clients and therapists perceive the LSB as a tool to facilitate communication and share difficult life experiences? (2) Can clients effectively disclose difficult life events during therapy sessions using the LSB? (3) How do clients and therapists describe their experience with the LSB? and (4) What aspects of the LSB process played a role in facilitating disclosure?

**VIDA VIEW LIFE STORY BOARD**

The LSB consists of a multicompartment kit of magnetic card sets of elements, markers, guide sheets, and accessories, with a 19” × 26” trifold magnet-receptive play board. Colored zones correspond to the personal self (yellow); family and close ones (green); community and environment (blue), and a timeline (red). Cards sets (“elements”) include categories that exist or occur in external reality of time and space (persons, things, places, events, acts, etc); and internal, non-physical components: feelings, roles, relationships, and so forth. Figure 1 presents the empty board as is presented before the LSB session begins. Figure 2 shows the LSB kit itself before use containing magnetic card sets of elements, markers, guide sheets, and accessories instructions. Figures 3 and 4 provide two examples of what the LSB might look like at the end of a session. The images show how the board provides a detailed visual of different aspects of the client’s life (images not of study participants due to confidentiality restrictions).

Cards are selected, written on, and drawn on, and alternately, marker symbols are placed to map out various dimensions or layers of the “storyboard.” For instance,
when discussing relationships, “Interaction Cards” can depict qualities such as loving, hostile, discord, manipulative, supportive, abusive and so forth. “Role Cards” identify sources of emotional comfort, guidance, role model, worry, and trust among the people represented in the storyboard.

As a visual information system, the LSB can be incorporated into clinical counseling activities, research interviews, and other applications. Used in counseling and psychotherapy, it is a versatile, non-standardized tool that enables diverse modes of expression, sharing, and reflection within the therapeutic relationship. It allows the client to map out or create a picture of their situation outside the bounds imposed by the linear/sequential structure of language and narrative.

How the LSB is used depends on factors such as the client’s age, purpose of the session, therapeutic modality, and personal style of the clinician. The LSB can be used for assessment purposes or blended into different therapeutic approaches, such as cognitive behavioral therapy, narrative therapy, and solution-focused therapy. The process can be directed and methodical, or it can be non-directed and responsive to the session’s unfolding. There is flexibility whether the physical storyboarding process is performed by the client or shared with or led by the therapist.
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE LSB PROCESS OF SHARING AND DISCLOSURE

Farber (2003) describes how both therapist and client are active in the therapy setting, observing and interpreting clients’ thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, with both participating to co-create meaning and observing the nature of what is being created. In the interaction of face-to-face conversation in conventional talk therapy, the therapist receives the information and seeks to understand what the client shares verbally and by way of their affect and non-verbal cues, as depicted in Figure 5.

The interactions of an LSB session differ in that interrelated aspects of the client’s situation are shared in the dialogical process with the therapist as well; when depicted on the LSB, they come into view for the client in a novel experience. For the client, this opens up a reflective process related to his/her own externalized material. This enables other pathways for sharing non-verbal disclosure; and as the therapist views the unfolding storyboard, it allows for alternate lines of exploration and hypothesis generating. Figure 6 illustrates the interaction of the LSB session of the client’s internal reflections visualizing his or her life story on the board. This enhances the therapist’s ability to work with the client and his or her issues in ways that are less bounded by verbalization. The client encounters his or her reflections projected onto the LSB as visualizing the scene from the outside. The therapist facilitates the reconstruction of the client’s situation within the therapeutic relationship with understanding and dialogue.

Three loci or nodes are formulated—the client, the therapist, and the board—in the sense that the LSB presents an externalized re-creation of the client’s own past and inner world, different from their subjective awareness of self; each can
register and respond in the process of the session. Correspondingly, there are three pathways of communication in an LSB session: the dialogical process, the verbal exchange between therapist and client; the client’s reflections visualizing his/her own life-scape; and the therapist’s comprehension and engagement in the storyboarding process. These three pathways may reconfigure and facilitate levels of comfort whereby the client is able to experience change during the session as they disclose difficult life events.

**METHODS**

This study took place in 2013 at Mount Carmel Clinic, a Winnipeg (Manitoba, Canada) nonprofit agency that provides health and social services including counseling to inner city residents, mostly newcomer immigrant or refugees, First Nations, and Métis. The study received ethics approval from the University of Manitoba’s Health Research Ethics Board and from the Board of Mount Carmel.

The recruitment and participation of counselors was done in consultation with the multicultural wellness and primary care programs at Mount Carmel. Six therapists volunteered to be part of the study, four females and two males. Involvement in the study required that they receive training on the LSB, conduct several sessions with clients using the LSB, take notes after the sessions in relation to the experience,
and participate in two focus groups (one prior to using the LSB in sessions with clients and one after having had several sessions). Two other therapists volunteered to participate in the initial focus group, without expectation that they be trained or use the LSB. Of the eight therapists, the one with greatest number of years of experience had 23 and the lowest 9, with an average of 17 years of experience.

Therapists identified potential clients and informed them about the study. Each therapist arranged a date and time for a researcher to meet the clients, further explain the study, respond to questions, and obtain written consent. Seven clients were enrolled in the study (one per therapist, with one therapist enrolling two clients). The expectation was that participating clients would have a minimum of two sessions in which the LSB was used. Of the seven clients that took part in the study, five were women and two were men, ranging in age from 21 to 65 years, with a mean age of 44. Two participants were originally from Canada, four from Middle East countries, and one from a South American country. The total number of sessions among the seven participating clients was 24, with an average of 3.4 sessions per client.

An initial focus group was held with the eight therapists, the purpose of which was to understand how they worked in regular sessions (without the LSB) and their experience with clients’ attitudes in the sessions and in dealing with the efforts of clients to disclose and share difficult life events. For their subsequent participation in the study, the therapists were asked to write observation notes about their clients’ behaviors, attitude, body language, and so on, as well as their own perceptions of similarities and differences between regular therapy sessions and sessions using the LSB.

A second focus group with six therapists was held after they had used the LSB in at least two sessions. There they discussed their clients’ experiences of the LSB and their own assessment of how well the LSB contributed or not to the disclosure of difficult life events. They also described clients’ attitudes, behaviors, and engagement during sessions with the LSB compared to regular sessions. There were no noticeable differences in therapists’ feedback based on years of experience as therapists. One member of the research team conducted semi-structured face-to-face individual interviews with the clients (after they had had sessions using the LSB) in order to explore their experience of the session and their perception of how using the LSB assisted or not with the disclosure of difficult life events.

The data from focus groups, interviews, transcripts, and observation notes were analyzed separately line-by-line by two of the researchers for content analysis. The analysis used both deductive and inductive approaches (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Deductively, using the above-mentioned conceptual framework, several categories that could serve to initially code the data were utilized. Inductively, the analysis developed further codes that identified new themes. The coding system ranked for logical relevance to the framework, seeking to confirm existing themes, identify and locate new themes, or both. Once all the themes were organized, statements of the relevant information were created to describe the themes and how
clients’ experiences and perceptions during therapy sessions with the LSB were understood. The researchers then again reviewed the original transcripts and reduced the number of overlapping categories. After several iterations of revisions, reviewing of transcripts and observation notes, and comparing themes, the final themes were identified and categorized. In the last phase, guided by the codes, the researchers selected interviewee quotes from the transcriptions to illustrate particular themes.

**FINDINGS**

The findings are presented in two sections: themes emerging from the clients’ perspective from the interviews; and those from the therapists’ perspective from focus group discussions.

**Clients’ Perspective**

From the clients’ interviews, four major themes emerged: *role play*, grounded on the LSB visual structure and on how clients visualize themselves, their lives, and their achievements and failures; *speaking inside out*: the effect of the LSB on communication with the therapist during the session; *feeling comfortable during the session*, and *disclosure of difficult life events*.

*Role Play.* Clients noted that it was easier for them to see themselves from the outside using the LSB. The LSB allowed the clients to place their life on the board. As a result, they found this was an opportunity to look for improvement and change. Some clients mentioned that they were able to visualize feelings and relationships. With the LSB, they were also able to visualize multiple connections and relationships with family, friends, and other people at the same time.

**CLIENT 1:** [Without LSB] so, it was really hard and stuff, didn’t wanna talk, it was just kinda you know in a shell. But using the storyboard, it gave you the role play where you can talk it out, so it really helped. It was just more easy to role play it instead of keeping it inside, it was just, it was easy to model what you wanna say and how to say it and stuff.

**CLIENT 4:** It was like a movie but in this case you were the director . . . I start to picture things and then I realize that you [the witnessing therapist] know that all the issues that I was going through.

**CLIENT 2:** Everything was there, like my ex-wife and everything, which I didn’t like talking about my ex-wife, but as we put all of these things in progress and everything on the board, it—I could see my life right there.

The LSB visual structure seemed to assist clients with the process of remembering the past by visualizing their life on the board in an organized way, including
placing events and experiences in chronological order. They also mentioned how they could look back to the past and also project themselves into the future, most likely because they were able to visualize what they were talking about.

CLIENT 6: At the beginning, I found it, I was remembering these things even when I went home I was constantly remembering all these things and I didn’t like it because again it’s going back to the past, again remembering these things, again it’s a reminder I lived in a mess, yes it was painful.

CLIENT 2: Like there was a lot of stuff that I didn’t wanna remember or I forgot, but with the LSB it was easy, everything just came back to you.

CLIENT 1: To understand our past and stuff, what our future might look like.

CLIENT 2: At first I was a little nervous about telling anybody about my past. Like I’m not ashamed about it, but I just didn’t wanna talk about my past, I just wanted to keep it inside me. But with the life board everything came out easier.

CLIENT 3: Because you retell the things that have happened to you and you put them like that.

Speaking Inside Out. Clients felt that when the LSB was used during the therapy sessions, they were able to disclose a greater amount of personal information. All seven participants indicated at some point that the process of communication during the therapy session was facilitated by using the LSB. They felt that the LSB helped the therapists to understand them better. In this way, the process of communication and the relationship between the client and the therapist seemed to become stronger.

CLIENT 1: When we didn’t use storyboard, everything stayed inside; it was hard to talk, about feelings and stuff, and the stuff that’s happening for the past and to our future.

CLIENT 3: I spoke everything I needed to say on it and what has happened, what hasn’t happened and everything I have overcome, and there I would just keep telling it.

CLIENT 4: This counseling session and in particular with this board that they use I saw different things, I experienced different situations, I talked about the problems different.

CLIENT 7: When you put the fact on the board, in a way it’ll lead the person to engage and share whatever is inside them. Sometimes when you go to the therapist or to counseling, there are things you don’t want to share you just keep inside you . . . but with that [LSB], it makes you engaged and share this information.

Feeling Comfortable. Five of the seven participants described feeling initially uncomfortable during the first session with the LSB, either because they did not understand what the LSB was or because it was new to them. Another reason for the discomfort was that they disliked what they observed about themselves on the
board. The other two clients felt comfortable with it right away. Once the session progressed, all clients reported feeling more comfortable.

CLIENT 2: First I was a little scared to do the life story and then as we went through it, it got easier, I felt at ease I was willing to say anything truthfully.

CLIENT 4: It was scary! So at the beginning I had this feeling of being anxious and I wasn’t sure what was going on with this board. So then I started to like it and then I felt comfortable with that.

CLIENT 6: The only time I disliked it was the first time when we used it because I was shocked because I saw the mess I was in and how I wasn’t going anywhere and how I was stuck. That’s the only time I had discomfort, but after that I wanted to use it and I wanted to continue.

Disclosure of Difficult Life Events. Six of the seven client participants reported having disclosed difficult life experiences to their therapists for the first time in their lives during the session using the LSB. They all felt that this act of sharing was significant and positive, whether as catharsis or indicative of the strength of the therapeutic relationship. Client 7 had previously shared everything with his wife. During the session, he was able to retell the events and what he experienced, and was also able in his own way to release what he could not say to his brother before he was killed.

CLIENT 1: Just to discuss about past things like with my ex and childhood and stuff and that happened.

CLIENT 2: I never ever talked about it and with the life board it made it easier for me to tell my counselor everything about it, which I never did.

CLIENT 3: I told her many things that happened with my ex-husband and all those things that only she knows.

CLIENT 4: There are moments that I thought that I didn’t say this to anybody, but I said it there; I shared it.

CLIENT 7: My story, no one else knows my story, the actual details of the story of what happened to my brother and what I went through myself. Only my wife knows all the details and all these events.

Client 5 was not very expressive; however, she mentioned that she had been able to disclose something important to her therapist and no one other than the two of them could know what it was: “That’s happened. That’s happened to me. I told my counselor something new.” Other clients stated:

CLIENT 6: I am very close to my mother—there are things that are between me and my husband in my life I wasn’t able to share that with my mother, but I was able to share that with my counselor he is the only one who knows.

CLIENT 7: And when I was on the LSB I was kind of forced or encouraged to let these things out that no one else knows about—just me and my wife.
All seven clients shared that after disclosing difficult life experiences during the session with the LSB, they felt good, more at peace, uplifted, and free.

CLIENT 1: More feeling at peace... it’s like a big thing lifted off our shoulders and, like it just gave you that inner peace that we worked something out and that everything just wound on the back shelf kind of thing and we left without you know... like happy and stuff.

CLIENT 2: I had a whole bunch of lifts on my—heavy shoulders, and after using it, I felt good. I felt easier, and I really felt good using it because it lifted a lot of weight off my shoulders.

CLIENT 1: Without it, I kept a lot of stuff inside, anger and sadness and everything inside me and stuff that I wanted to go and stuff, so the storyboard really helped to do that.

**Therapists’ Perspective**

Three major themes emerged from the focus groups: (1) the LSB’s visual structure—how it facilitated the process of communication, (2) the comfort of the therapist while using the LSB, and (3) the therapists’ assumptions about disclosure during therapy sessions.

**LSB Visual Structure.** A point of interest for the therapists was how the LSB allowed the clients to observe their lives from the outside. All six therapists were in agreement on this point.

THERAPIST 1: When a person has their story in front of them, it gives them some distance so that they can see it kind of like an observer.

THERAPIST 5: It helps them remove themselves from being in the crazy-making or the crisis. It helps them be removed and then be in a position outside looking in and to kinda have that control.

THERAPIST 6: Separating themselves from the issue right? And they are viewing from the outside inside.

The therapists stated that the visual structure of the LSB facilitated the organization of experiences and life events. Clients could focus better on what they were talking about and depicted their stories without jumping from one topic to another, thus helping the therapist have a better understanding of what the clients were talking about.

THERAPIST 2: There were people she mentioned I thought they were in Winnipeg and having influence in her life and those people were actually in another country. So, ok, these people are in another country but they are still actively involved in her life and she is still interested in their life.
THERAPIST 4: When you make them focus on the board, there are so many things going on in the head, so once you put it down on the board, it gives them more focus and they can link things together.

THERAPIST 5: I have a lot of clients who are dealing with trauma, it’s the timeline; they can start where they want to start so it makes them feel safe in terms of where they want to begin.

Two of the therapists used the LSB after having tried other tools without much success. Another therapist mentioned that he used it when clients had difficulty talking.

THERAPIST 5: How I initially used it was I would pick certain clients who I felt either weren’t going anywhere clinically, or they couldn’t see the larger picture in terms of problem solving . . . If they were coming in and consistently it was the same issue being brought up, and if I was using different theories and approaches and it wasn’t—they still weren’t grasping the reasons why and like reflecting, then I would use the LSB.

THERAPIST 3: When other things don’t work and when I am stuck, it is like it helps to discover other things that can help you and it gives uh when clients have difficulty identifying issues.

Another therapist used the LSB to assist some of his clients with a history of trauma to focus by visualizing things on the board.

THERAPIST 5: To visualize how things go and how life goes and to make them focus especially with people who have been traumatized . . . Their process of thinking is not really there and they just jump from topic to topic . . . one of the challenges in terms of trauma is probably the lack of concentration, the loss of focus, the memory loss of things. But with the board itself working through that timeline, it helps them to bring those things back into the forefront.

Therapist Comfort. In preparation for the session before the client arrived, two of the therapists would set up the LSB with cards related to the information that was known from the client’s first or second session. Another therapist did not set up the LSB with all the pieces but instead would prepare what he thought he might use or need, so as to avoid the distraction of having to look for pieces during the therapy session and save time. The rest used the LSB several times with no previous set-up. One of the therapists reported feeling distracted with the LSB during the therapy session, and another reiterated that this happened on some occasions.
THERAPIST 1: Well for me, I’m more present to the whole person when I don’t have the LSB there, cuz we’re busy with pieces and figuring out what is what, so to me there was less focus on the individual and what they were processing or discussing.

THERAPIST 2: But if you are doing intensive talking about issues, you want to be present instead of looking at the board and being distracted so it depends.

The six therapists confirmed that using the LSB requires certain conditions: more time, additional work, and sufficient table space. Therapists also acknowledged that the LSB helps both the client and the therapist.

THERAPIST 2: Because I set it up myself, it gave me time to go through the pieces myself and get familiarized with the pieces I have on the board.

THERAPIST 5: It’s kinda easier for the client to do—to see, but it’s kinda harder for me cuz I’ll be doing the whole work on the client just laying down their thoughts and things like that so in a way. . . . With life board it’s gonna take time, longer but the client actually benefits from that.

The therapists learned to use the LSB over the course of the study period. In the final focus group, two of the six felt sufficiently comfortable and confident with the LSB that they would choose to use it at the outset of working with a new client, whereas the other four felt they would spend a few sessions with the client before they considered introducing the LSB.

Disclosure During Therapy Sessions. Some of the therapists realized that clients had disclosed something for the first time ever. Others assumed that this disclosure would usually happen during therapy with or without the LSB. It came as a surprise to several therapists to learn about these first-time revelations in the final focus group.

THERAPIST 2: Having the story on the board could trigger . . . I guess hidden memories that maybe the clients says, “oh yeah, this happened!” that I guess unconsciously, somewhere in the back of their mind having the picture there could trigger those memories . . . for them to disclose.

THERAPIST 3: They are seeing it on the board so it is easier. [Without LSB]… was very confusing and it was too many issues, too many things happening in her life.

THERAPIST 4: It’s in their mind, but like you know all these years they’re hidden there, but once they talk about it and it’s in front of them and they visualize it, they will disclose it.

THERAPIST 6: It’s their story, their life, and replaying that on the board for you . . . So actually I think one of the sessions with the LSB helped him to divulge something that he had been struggling with to really talk about.
The therapists described that the LSB would be useful for different purposes, among them: for discussing domestic violence; for behavior modification; to set future goals and the steps a person would take to set those goals; to identify the family and friends in the individual’s life; and to identify strengths, problems, and solutions.

**DISCUSSION**

The study sought to understand how clients perceive the LSB as a tool to facilitate communication and share difficult life experiences and how they experience the use of the LSB, if it helps them to disclose difficult life events, and if so what aspects of the LSB process played a role.

Overall, the perception of the clients was that the LSB helped them communicate more openly and even share difficult life experiences more readily. Although the therapists also noticed this, they seemed to assume that clients commonly disclose in therapy, and that the use of the LSB was not necessarily a factor that made this substantially better. The view of the LSB as a facilitator of communication came out more strongly from the clients’ narratives than from the therapists. Clients reported in fact that they disclosed more with the LSB than they would have in conventional therapy sessions without the LSB, and that they had even disclosed difficult life events never disclosed to anyone before. In the follow-up interviews, all clients reported that the LSB facilitated the process of communication, helped to release hidden or uncomfortable life events and experiences, and assisted their therapists to understand them better. Clients felt that when the LSB was used during the therapy sessions, they were able to disclose a greater amount of personal information.

Clients reported feeling somewhat uncomfortable initially during LSB sessions, particularly when they observed themselves on the board and they had to confront themselves and their past. Once the sessions progressed, their comfort level with the LSB increased. Clients suggested that having visual and verbal components seemed to facilitate the conversations because their life events were externalized. Clients noted that it was easier for them to see themselves from the outside using the LSB. The LSB seemed to allow the clients to place their life on the board and visualize what they had done. For instance, some clients mentioned that they were able to visualize feelings and relationships, thus making it easier to talk about them. The clients’ experience with the LSB was that it allowed them to observe their lives from the outside. Their sense that it assisted them in visualizing feelings and relationships was confirmed by the view of the therapists, who argued that the visual structure of the LSB seemed to facilitate the organization of life events and experiences.

The LSB visual structure appeared to assist clients with the process of remembering the past by visualizing their life on the board in an organized way, including
The Life Story Board

placing events and experiences in chronological order. It also helped them to look
back to the past and also project themselves into the future, most likely because
they were able to visualize what they were talking about. No particular differences
were noticed among participants based on their gender, age, or country of origin.
The role of the visual structure of the LSB was corroborated by the therapists’ feed-
back. They argued that it allowed the clients to observe their lives from the outside.

Narrative therapy aspects of the LSB appeared similar to narrative approaches
of the genogram. As Kuehl (1996) and Chrzastowski (2011) explain, the genogram
creation is an opportunity to explore family stories with the invitation to reflect
upon and re-author a person’s role within that story. LSB methods suggest similar
potential to these approaches, with the advantages of a more dynamic and playful
interface. As a tool for therapeutic work, the LSB appears to be a dynamic and
multidimensional alternative to the genogram as used in systemic therapies (Mc-
Goldrick et al., 2008). The LSB builds on approaches of the genogram and eco-map
to organize family information and help overcome reticence in sharing personal
aspects of life. This is somewhat similar to other approaches, such as The Tree of
Life that helps children talk about their lives (Denborough, 2008). With The Tree
of Life, children draw their own tree and label it with themes such as where they
come from (their roots), their personal wishes and ideas, and their thoughts about
their intelligence and abilities. It also shares some of the qualities of Sandtray,
a play therapy intervention (Lowenfeld, 1979) that uses a square sand tray and
miniature figures selected from collections of hundreds to assist young clients to
express themselves. According to Kalff (1981), when integrated into the method
of Jungian traditional talk therapy, the process facilitates communication with
nonverbal clients (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2011). One other approach, The Lifeline
Chart (Eos Life-Work Resource Centre, 1999) shares similarities. The Lifeline
Chart was developed to monitor stress and change, and to encourage clients to think
about earlier life events, on influences, people, events, life changes, and how life
moves on. On The Lifeline Chart, time runs horizontally, from birth to the present.

The findings of this study merit further discussion about the plausible mecha-
nisms at play regarding the success of the LSB. During psychotherapy, the therapist
guides the session and the client tells and reconstructs the story, piece by piece.
Through this process, the client reflects on his or her personal life by placing him/herself out of the story and visualizing the panorama of their life from the outside,
and the therapist comprehends and understands more and more of the client’s life
story. As a result, effective therapeutic communication is achieved when the client
perceives the therapist’s understanding of his or her situation. This process gener-
ates a therapeutic relationship based on understanding and dialogue between client
and therapist. This is what Duncan and colleagues (2003) refer to as an “alliance.”
According to Farber (2003), both therapist and client are active in the therapy
setting, observing and interpreting clients’ thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and
both participate to co-create meaning. The use of the LSB in therapy sessions fol-
lows this model, adding a third path of communication—the client, the therapist,
and the board. These three paths of communication appeared to facilitate a level of comfort where the client is able to experience change during the session and disclose difficult life events. In fact, this may be of particular importance for clients with limited literacy, cultural barriers, and discomfort verbalizing and disclosing sensitive information.

The study had a number of limitations. The small number of clients and therapists that took part in the study, as well as the fact that they were from only one agency, raises caution to the extent that this may be applicable to other clients and settings. Further, not having directly observed the sessions and relying on the self-reporting of clients and therapists also presents a limitation.

Despite these limitations, the findings provided insight into the perceptions of seven clients who attended therapy sessions using the LSB. The study suggested that the use of the LSB may enhance clients’ experiences during therapy sessions, in particular those with difficult life experiences. The study findings can also serve as a guide for future studies. For instance, studies with large sample sizes that adopt Duncan and colleagues’ session rating scale (2003) would be valuable. It would also allow exploration of the experiences of clients of different ages, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and mental health. These studies should also assess LSB therapy sessions using Miller and colleagues’ (1997) four common therapeutic elements: extra therapeutic aspects; technique; relationship between client and therapist; and expectancy for change.

In summary, the study findings suggest that the LSB may be an effective tool in overcoming clients’ inhibition to disclose personal life experiences they are unable or unwilling to verbalize. It became integral to the therapy process with active participation of the client. The LSB offered an alternative mode of communication and gave clients a new way to externalize their difficult life events. It may be particularly valuable when conventional approaches are frustrated by difficulties. The LSB offers a way to think visually as well as speak visually, and allows the client to picture things (as we do in dreams and other forms of active imagination) without first imposing the rather more linear/sequential structure of language and narrative. The LSB is one of many therapeutic modalities. Nonetheless, therapists who integrate the LSB into their practice should be trained and supervised until they become proficient in using this potentially powerful and novel visual technique as a clinical tool.

REFERENCES


The Life Story Board


