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Training Life Space Crisis Intervention, theory and practice.

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Introduction and background of author and subject

Life Space Crisis Intervention (LSCI) is a verbal and therapeutic strategy elaborated with the purpose to help children and youth in crisis. This strategy is based on cognitive, psychodynamic, behavioral and developmental theory. The roots of LSCI go back to Fritz Redl who, together with David Wineman, used the concept of Life Space Interview (LSI). Redl and Wineman used the interview for the treatment of delinquent youths in Detroit in the 1950s. The attention was given to the direct life space or daily experience of the youth. Redl and Wineman were the first who considered an adolescent's crisis as a therapeutic and central part in treatment. In 1981 Nicholas Long, a student from Redl and developer of the Conflict Cycle, published a work on LSI and promoted it as a required skill that helps educators to handle problem youngsters at school. Later on, in 1992, Long and Mary Wood published a textbook 'Life Space Intervention' for teachers. That same year, Long and Frank Fecser developed a training program for LSCI. The basis of the professional structure and standard for further trainings was made. LSCI is now an internationally recognized professional and certificated training program. In 2000, Franky D'Oosterlinck followed the training by Mark Freado senior trainer in 'The Institute of Life Space Crisis Intervention' in South Dakota, USA. D'Oosterlinck was the first who introduced the method LSCI in Belgium. He implemented it in the Orthopedagogical Observation and Treatment Centre (OOBC) 'Nieuwe Vaart' in Ghent where he is the director of the day treatment for children with behavior- en emotional disturbances. A collaboration with eight treatment centres in the East of Flanders has led to the implementation of other research programs in Belgium. Karen Dille, one of the authors of this article and scientific coworker of the OOBC, followed a LSCI training by D'Oosterlinck. Karin Blankespoor, from the Netherlands, attended the Conference in Ghent where the first research results were presented in 2004. At the time there was great need for a method to deal with crises and aggression as a nearby school asked Cardea, the treatment centre in Leiden where Blankespoor works as an orthopedagogue, for help. LSCI appeared an appropriate answer to these needs. Blankespoor started following the training sessions in Belgium, and at last in the USA. And since 2007 training sessions in LSCI have started in the Netherlands and along with implementation in various youth care settings.

The main paper

LSCI is a verbal, therapeutic and conflict management model for children and youth in crisis that is used on the moment of the crisis or as soon as possible afterwards. This interactive and non-physical method is very suitable to help socially, emotionally or behaviorally disturbed children cope with crises in life. It is less functional for children with severe autism, acute psychosis or with weak intellectual abilities (IQ < 70) because the intervention relies on the youth his awareness of self, events and other people and his motivation and ability to share

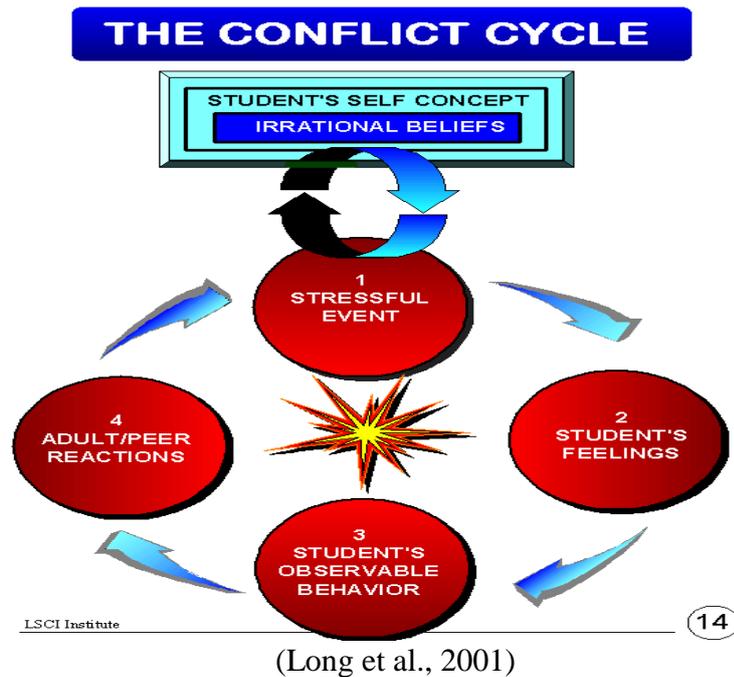
and use verbal information (Long, Wood & Fecser, 2001). Teachers and educators can use this intervention at school or in a day treatment or residential setting where the child or youth stays.

The focus of the LSCI intervention is on the crisis that occurs when an incident leads to a conflict between youths and others (see 4.1). Because such crisis engages a student's immediate life experience, LSCI sees and applies crisis situations as a positive opportunity for learning, growth, insight and change. LSCI believes talking with children and youth in a crisis reveals the core reasons for chronic behavior problems. Together with the child, the adult passes through six stages during the LSCI intervention (see 4.2). This process provides the child the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the interaction between thoughts, feelings and behavior (see 4.3). The reactions of the child in stressful events, are being used to accomplish change in behavior, reduce anxiety, enhance self-esteem and improve understanding and insight into the child's own behavior and feelings and also those of others. By talking about the feelings and (re)action of the child to the crisis, the adult wants to promote an active choice in and personal responsibility for the child's actions. Besides that, the child learns even more alternative behavior to cope with stress, emotions and crisis. When these goals are reached, the child will also have an improved self-esteem.

The Conflict Cycle

The Conflict Cycle describes the circular and escalating nature of a conflict (Long & Morse, 1996). It is a way of understanding the elements that create a crisis. The Conflict Cycle is developed by Nicholas Long (1965). To define the concept of 'conflict', one has to examine the discrepancy between the needs of the individual and the possibilities of the environment. In the Conflict Cycle, the crisis is a product of a child's stress nourished by the reactions of others.

According to Long, a conflict develops as follows: an event provokes stress and makes a connection with the personal, painful background of the child or youth. This connection causes feelings, thoughts and/or anxiety that often brings out negative behavior in the child. In turn this provokes negative behavior reactions from others who may be experienced again as a source of stress. The Conflict Cycle leads inevitably to a crisis when we don't break the patterns of actions and reactions that produces the crisis. LSCI offers a method to handle a crisis well.



The six stages within a LSCI intervention

During a LSCI conversation the adult and the child are allies that deal with the problem situation. Together they pass through six sequential stages. The first three stages (drain off, timeline and central issue) are the diagnostic stages in which the adult and child focus on clarifying the incident and forming a central theme. In the last three stages (insight, new skills and transfer of learning), the reclaiming stages, the attention of the conversation shifts from problem exploration towards problem solving. The adult and the child explore ways to resolve the immediate crisis and search together for better outcomes when the situation and stress occurs again.

- Stage 1: Drain off

The purpose of the first stage, is to support and understanding the youngster's stress, to drain off emotional intensity caused by stress and to identify the incident. Together with the adult, the child starts talking about the incident in order to prepare the child to give a verbal reflection on the incident that happened.

- Stage 2: Timeline

During the second step, the adult and youngster talk in sufficient detail to clarify and expand understanding about the reality components of the incident. This happens by putting up a sequence of events, a timeline, in order to obtain details of the youngster's view of the incident, the associated stress and personal involvement.

- Stage 3: Central issue

The goal of the third step is to find the central issue. The adult does this by exploring the child's perception of the incident and his associated feelings and anxieties. The extent to

which the behavior of the youngster is driven and his amount of rational control, must be clarified. When the adult has gathered enough information, he can decide what the therapeutic aim of the intervention should be and can select the appropriate reclaiming intervention (see 4.3). The adult also determines what the long-term and short-term outcomes should be for the youngster as a result of this specific LSCI intervention.

- Stage 4: Insight

The purpose of the fourth step, is to enable the youngster to achieve new insight into his repetitive patterns of behavior so that he can develop a plan for change. Solutions, selected from several alternatives, should establish the values both of the group and the youngster and reality consequences that will work in the youngster's behalf.

- Stage 5: New skills

In this fifth step, the child will learn and practice the new skills to deal with a similar problem in the future. A plan for success is developed. The adult and child rehearse what will happen when the chosen solution is actually put into action. They anticipate reactions and feelings of self and others.

- Stage 6: Transfer of learning

During this last step the adult and the youngster get ready to resume activity. This happens in order to close down private topics or feelings that may have surfaced during the talk and to plan the youngster's transition back into the group's ongoing activity. The adult and the youngster anticipate how to manage the reentry into the peer group and discuss the consequence associated with the incident. Finally, the adult gives information about the incident to the other educators and to the other youngsters of the group.

Types of reclaiming interventions

Using one of the six reclaiming interventions for troubled youth, the adult can deal with almost any central issue. The names that are being used are reformulations of the original therapeutic goals of Fritz Redl (Redl & Wineman, 1957; Long et al., 2001). The choice for a certain reclaiming intervention is based on the perception that the youngster has on the incident and the problem and on the judgment that the adult has about the youngster's motivation to change. Each and every goal should provide a new and broader insight for the youngster. The six reclaiming interventions are 'Reality Rub', 'Red Flag', 'Symptom Estrangement', 'Massaging Numb Values', 'New Tools Salesmanship' and 'Manipulation of Body Boundaries Reclaiming' Intervention.

- The 'Reality Rub Reclaiming' Intervention

This type of crisis intervention is being used for youngsters who demonstrate errors in perception. The process of the intervention consists of the organization of the youngster's perceptions into an accurate logical sequence of events. The aim of this process is to bring order to confusion and to demonstrate a cause and effect relationship namely 'nothing comes from nothing'. The goals of this intervention are to correct interpersonal distortions and misperceptions, to identify defense mechanisms, to connect behavior to feelings, to bond

feelings to a stressful incident and this stressful incident to irrational beliefs. It is also the task of the adult to help the youngster accept a natural consequence as a function of poor decision-making skills and to identify this pattern of self-defeating behavior.

- The 'Red Flag Reclaiming' Intervention

This reclaiming intervention should be used with youngsters who demonstrate any of the following types of self-defeating behaviors: they overreact to normal rules and procedures by screaming, crying, threatening, attacking or running away. They are motivated to escalate their behavior into a manifest 'no win situation' power struggle with staff that will result in more rejection and feelings of alienation.

The intervention has two goals. The first goal is to acknowledge that the problems the youngster caused in school or in the institute are not the cause of his problems and to identify the 'dynamics of this displacement'. A second goal is to practice new ways of managing his home or school problems and thoughts, which arouse intense feelings.

The process of the intervention consists out of three aspects: the perception that the youngster's behavior is different or bizarre that day, the de-escalation of his self-defeating behaviors and the determination of the source of his intense feelings and inappropriate behaviors. It is the task of the staff member to control his counter-aggressive feelings toward the youngster while working through the multiple layers of youngsters resistance in order to identify the source of his inappropriate behavior.

- The 'Symptom Estrangement Reclaiming' Intervention

This type of crisis intervention is used in order to benignly confront unacceptable behavior. For youngsters who justify their aggressive behavior, who are not motivated to change and have serious conflicts, this intervention is the right one. These youngsters cast themselves into the role of the victim who has been exploited by others and now must protect themselves. They frequently receive secondary pleasure and status from their peer group, are narcissistic and believe nothing is wrong with them. The process of this intervention consists of the obtainment of a timeline. The adult has to appeal to their narcissism, to highlight their past versus current responses, to accept their feelings but not their behavior, to clarify the 'Law of the Streets' versus the values of a therapeutic treatment program and to benignly confront their defenses and irrational beliefs in an effort to create some anxiety about their aggressive behavior. The goal is to expose their self-deception slowly while also maintaining a caring relationship. So they will realize they are too smart to continue their self-defeating behavior and the staff will confront them every time they try to justify their aggression.

- The 'Massaging Numb Values Reclaiming' Intervention

This intervention should be used with youngsters who act out impulsively and then feel guilty about their behavior and/or youngsters who are burdened by intense feelings of remorse shame and inadequacy, and seek out additional forms of punishment to cleanse their guilt. The intervention aims to strengthen the self-control skills of the youngster. Frequently, these youngsters have a history of being abused, neglected, abandoned, deprived and subsequently have low self-esteem. The process of this intervention enhances the avoidance of any guilt-inducing statement by managing all self-destructive behaviors first. The process also admits to attack the irrational beliefs about magnification and emotional reasoning. This happens in order to give abundant affirmation and reflections about existing desirable attitudes, traits and behaviors such as kindness, fairness and friendship. In that way they will be focused on the

control side of the issue and not on the impulsive side. By doing that the youngster will become aware of the fact that he has more self-control than he realized and that he can make mistakes without feeling that he's worthless. In that way the self-control system will improve.

- The 'New Tools Salesmanship Reclaiming' Intervention

This intervention should be submitted in order to teach new social skills to youngsters who have the correct attitudes toward the staff, peers and learning, but who lack age appropriate social skills to be successful. In the process of the intervention it is very important to obtain an accurate timeline, to review it with the youngster and make the connection or interpretation between the youngster's intention and the behavior. Once the youngster can focus on his right attitude instead of his wrong behavior, the staff affirms the youngster's right attitude and reinforces that the youngster and staff are on the same side. Once this positive relationship is established, you can move to outcome goals such as teaching age appropriate social skills by using pro-social skills training strategies.

- The 'Manipulation of Body Boundaries Reclaiming' Intervention

Within the theme of exposing exploitation by peers, this is a very prone intervention. It should be used with two 'types' of youngsters. The first group includes youngsters who are neglected, isolated or loners and who develop a self-defeating friendship with an exploitative classmate. In this relationship the dependent youngster frequently maintains the relationship by acting out his friend's appropriate wishes. The second group includes youngsters who are 'set up' and 'controlled' by a bright passive aggressive youngster. In this relationship the aggressive youngster is unaware of how he's being manipulated by his passive aggressive classmate and reacts inappropriately to the provocation. The process is different for the two groups. In the case of false friendship it is essential for both youngsters to be involved in the interview. The strategy is to get the exploitative friend to act his 'manipulation' in front of the victim and staff thereby demonstrating how the manipulator uses the victim for his own needs. In the case of being set up by others the aggressive victim can be seen alone. The focus is to demonstrate how the aggressive youngster is in trouble when he reacts to the other youngster's manipulation. This is done in order to accomplish two goals. The first goal is to demonstrate that a friend is someone who helps you and makes your life better, not worse. The second goal is to demonstrate that the aggressive youngster is giving his controls and his freedom to the manipulative passive aggressive youngster when the aggressive youngster reacts to his provocation.

Conclusion and/or discussion

Several research studies were designed to evaluate the value of the therapeutic conflict management model LSCI on the mental health of children and youth with emotional and behavioral disorders. Here we discuss a few studies that illustrate the effectiveness and usefulness of LSCI.

In 1999 until 2000, Carol Dawson did a research on the implementation of LSCI in a school for troubled students in New York City. The study had a quasi-experimental design. Two matched junior high schools for special education were compared. Together the research sample contained 91 students with emotional disturbances between the ages of 11 to 15. Both schools had similar behavior management programs and differed only in the methodology for dealing with students in crisis. The school staff of the experimental group, received a training

in LSCI while the school staff in the control group got support in the development of own strategies to manage crisis. The results of the study demonstrated the positive effects of LSCI. The number of student crises in the LSCI group was significantly reduced while in the control group the amount of crises significantly increased. In comparison with the control group, the experimental group had also a greater reduction in the number of student suspensions and a better attendance rate of students. Furthermore the LSCI program had a positive outcome on the transfer of students to other environments such as general education. Compared to the control group, none of the students in the experimental group were transferred to a more restrictive program, an increased number of students in the LSCI group were transferred to a less restrictive environment and more students from the experimental group were partially mainstreamed to a general education program. Finally, the staff who had a training in LSCI felt more confident in their abilities to deal with crises of students (Dawson, 2003).

In 2002, the LSCI program was implemented in six treatment centres in East Flanders of Belgium. All the centres provide residential treatment for children and youth with emotional and behavioral disorders. The evaluation of the LSCI program was conducted with a quasi-experimental design. 62 students aged between 9 to 19 years old, were divided into two matched groups. The difference between the experimental group and control group was situated in the conversations between the staff and the students. In the control group, the staff communicated spontaneous and with great regard for the student. The staff in the experimental group completed a training course in LSCI and used this structured method when they communicate with the students. Five measurements (the MASC, the SIB, the BDHI-D, the CBSA and the CBCL) were used to examine the effectiveness of the LSCI program. The research results confirm a positive effect of the LSCI intervention on direct aggression and hostility of students. The LSCI method led to a positive trend with respect to anxious coping, harm avoidance, separation/panic and total anxiety of the students (D'Oosterlinck, Goethals, Broekaert, Schuyten & De Maeyer, 2008). In 2003 and 2005, the staff in the experimental group were contacted and asked to give feedback on the LSCI method. Many educators reported that LSCI training provided them a constructive strategy and extended listening skills (D'Oosterlinck, 2006). In 2004, 17 youngsters were randomly chosen out of the experimental group and were interviewed about their experience with conflicts and the implementation of LSCI within their group. The results indicated that youngsters gained a more realistic view on their role in the conflict situation. Youngsters themselves stressed their need for time to deescalate their strong emotions and their need for unconditioned acceptance by the adult (D'Oosterlinck, Broekaert & Denoo, 2006).

In 2005 until July 2008, the Orthopedagogical Observation and Treatment Centre (OIBC) 'Nieuwe Vaart' implemented LSCI in the Provincial Institute Heynsdaele in Belgium. This institute has a residential setting and school for youth with behavior and emotional disturbances aged 12 to 21. In 2006 the staff of the institute received a LSCI training so that the staff had a consistent approach to handle the behavior problems of the youth. One year later a part of the employees and youth were interviewed and observations in the groups and classes were done to investigate the effectiveness of LSCI. The results of the several questionnaires showed the positive effects of LSCI for the staff and youth. The use of the LSCI method diminished the extent of anxiety of the youth and the number of conflicts and truants and provided new social skills to the youth. The number of moments that problem behavior of the youth disturbed the daily routine also declined. After all educators and teachers were satisfied with the implementation of the LSCI technique and chose to continue the use of this method in the future (D'Oosterlinck, Goethals & Spriet, 2008).

In April 2008, the staff of the OIBC 'Nieuwe Vaart' and the University of Ghent organized the first international EFeCT (European Federation of Conflict Management and Treatment in Education and care) congress in Belgium. Several country's including the Netherlands,

Norway, Scotland, Germany and the USA, were represented at the congress to discuss the information and scientific studies about conflict management methods. Special attention was given to the LSCI method. In the years coming such a congress is planned to be repeated annually, in smaller or bigger set, in collaboration with various European countries and the USA.

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