I SAY WHAT I THINK: the method of TOC (Theory of Constraints) used during therapy of stuttering

Introduction

Stuttering is a specific barrier that prevents the ability to effectively communicate (Parkowski, 2007). Challenges that come with having a stutter in everyday situations include difficulty verbalizing thoughts as well as expressing needs and emotions. These factors can have many social consequences, including difficulty establishing and maintaining satisfactory personal relationships as well as problems functioning in a group, school, or workplace environment. As a result, this can lead to a reduction of one’s quality of life and one’s ability to achieve life goals (O’Connor, 2008, Leary, Smith, 2001).

The goal of this poster is to show the practical aspect of the Theory of Constraints, a theory created by Dr. E. Goldratt. TOC is one of the methods that can be implemented in therapy for people with stuttering. “I Say What I Think” is an innovative method that implements the tools used in the Theory of Constraints and adapts them to interact with stuttering. The effectiveness of the therapy relies on the use of the three visual TOC tools: the ambitious target tree, the cloud, and the logical branch. These tools are very helpful in identifying the limitations associated with stuttering, designing a treatment plan that identifies the individual’s needs and accommodates for their level of ability, improving interpersonal skills, helping to overcome a fear of speaking, increasing motivation to continue therapy, as well as improving self-esteem, self-acceptance, and self-sufficiency.

Theoretical foundation

The genesis of the Theory of Constraints by Dr. E. M. Goldratt dates back to the 1970s. The theory is based on an individual’s focus on the process of ongoing improvement and on developing their potential by identifying and controlling the constraints that exist in the world around them. The “Theory of Constraints” includes three main principles: (1) a constraint exists, (2) a constraint limits performance, and (3) a constraint can be overcome. The Theory of Constraints (TOC) suggests that by using the theory, one can achieve significant improvements in almost any type of activity, regardless of its complexity (Goldratt, 2002).

Based on the Theory of Constraints, the TOC method utilizes three different cognitive tools: The Cloud, the Logical Branch, and the Ambitious Target Tree. Their dissemination into the world of education is carried out by the pro-social and international organization TOCIE (TOC for Education), founded in 1995 by E. M. Goldratt, which conducts its activities in over 26 countries, including Poland. The TOCIE program supports children and youth in, among others, acquiring skills for effective communication, determining and expressing one’s own needs, setting and achieving goals, and predicting the consequences of events related to decisions made. The visual tools used in the TOC method help answer questions that arise in every aspect of life, including within stuttering therapy, such as “What to change?”, “What to change for?” and “How to change?” (Suerken, 2007).

Implementation of the project

“I Say What I Think”, the implementation of the Theory of Constraints (TOC) method, was deployed into group therapy for stuttering children and adolescents at the Psychological and Pedagogical Clinic in Chełmno. The project equips a stuttering person with tools to manage their stuttering. Using these tools increases their willingness to communicate, improves their interpersonal contacts, and decreases their anxiety surrounding communication. As a result, the individual’s quality of life improves significantly. The activities realized within the implementation of the project took place in four age groups once a week for 1 hour over a period of 2 years. A total of 37 people aged 5 to 15 years participated. Activities were adapted to the age, needs, and psychophysiological abilities of each participant and parents and caregivers were involved.

The TOC method used during classes was a method that supports the process of group stuttering therapy. The intended goals of the therapy included, among others, learning about alternative methods of stuttering management, talking openly about stuttering, designing the therapy’s process and including its goals, decreasing the prominence of logophobia, increasing readiness to communicate, improving fluidity of speech through the use of the appropriate methods and techniques, as well as increasing self-esteem, self-confidence, and a sense of competence. The graphical and visual diagrams of TOC tools that were used in the method are easy to understand and are versatile enough to be applied to both education at all levels and therapy for children, adolescents, and adults of various abilities.

Conclusions

Programming of the therapy process should take into account a variety of therapy-related impacts, as in accordance with the principles of evidence-based psychotherapy (EBP), including available and proven practices and forms of speech therapy in combination with other forms of therapy, such as psychotherapy and sociotherapy. Regardless of the chosen strategy and therapeutic methods, it is necessary to monitor and adapt the treatment plan on an ongoing basis based on the patient’s needs, capabilities, and expectations. It is a so-called “tailor-made” plan. The author’s innovative method “I Say What I Think”, the use of the Theory of Constraints (TOC) in stuttering therapy, may support the process of speech therapy. Based on the therapeutic value confirmed by the results of various studies, “I Say What I Think” is an innovative and effective, methodological proposal that can be used in therapy for people with stuttering.