

Communicating the Uncommunicable: *The Use of Lowenfeld Mosaics as an Expressive Tool for the Deaf*

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Introduction

Good morning everyone. My name is Therese Woodcock. Today I am going to tell you something about the use of an expressive tool called the Lowenfeld Mosaics. The Mosaics was devised by Dr Margaret Lowenfeld, a pioneer in the field of child psychology and psychotherapy. I trained under Dr Lowenfeld as a child psychotherapist using her projective methods, one of which is the Lowenfeld Mosaics.

For the past ten years, and with the co-operation of the staff of Hayfield, I have pioneered and developed its use as an expressive instrument for the deaf.

Now to the substance of today's communication:

When we talk about Communication, we usually think in terms of the Language of Communication; and when we think of the language of communication, we usually think in terms of Verbal Language. We are also familiar with the term Body Language, the meaning of which it is often recognised as "difficult to read". We in this audience know well there is another kind of Language: Sign Language. So I am sure that amongst the group here we are not only attuned to the notion of different kinds of languages, but also to the knowledge that it could be difficult for us to communicate, even if we seem to be 'talking' the same 'language'.

Today I wish to speak about yet another kind of Language: another non-verbal language which also makes use of our hands, where the Process of the communication is as important as the final Product, where the language is idiosyncratic to the user but still capable of being understood by another. It is the language expressive of a personality in action: expressing the total situation as they see or feel it to be. The Lowenfeld Mosaics offers just such an expressive tool, just such a language.

I will begin by showing you the alphabet, so to speak, upon which each and every one of us can express ourselves whoever we are and from whatever cultural background we come.

The Lowenfeld Mosaic material consists of a box of mathematically interrelated coloured shapes from which a selection is made and something is made on a tray of specific dimensions.

(Slides 1, 2 & 3: demonstration of Lowenfeld Mosaic material)

The administrative procedure is quite simple: the Mosaics in the box & the tray are already on the table, all the shapes and colours will be shown, the subject will be asked to, and I quote from Lowenfeld, "make something with some of these pieces, anything you like. Tell me when you have finished". This procedure has been adapted for use with the deaf people at Hayfield, taking into account firstly the fact that sign language is different to spoken language and secondly, the level of understanding of the client.

As you can see, the material as vocabulary, is limited to 6 colours and 5 shapes, is standardised, provides a neutral focus to work from and requires the minimum of skill.

The **process** of making something with some pieces (ie how the pieces are deployed and the manner in which this deployment has been achieved) as well as the final **product**, makes what Lowenfeld calls the **Total Response**. What would be revealed would be a **portrait of the personality in action**, a statement of her/his situation as perceived by the Mosaic maker.

The skill is in our understanding of the communication, of that which has been presented to us. If we have managed to observe as carefully and as objectively as our training has made possible, this presentation, the Total Response, will express the style of the Mosaic maker's approach to life situations in miniature; it will express how he or she goes about responding to the problems posed by these living situations.

To give you some idea of the subtlety of the Mosaic Total Response, today and because of the strictures of time, I am going to give only two examples from the work at Hayfield.

3 Slides: 18,19, 20: The first example will also show you what care has to be taken for a better understanding of what has been expressed in the **process** of the making of a Mosaic.

Slide 18: This is the Mosaic maker's first Mosaic. I have numbered the first five moves which as you can see, looks like the beginnings of a weaving movement.

Slide 19: His next Mosaic was made 27 months later, and for him, this was a great improvement, which was generally reflected in his daily life at Hayfield. However, the staff had an uneasy feeling that in some fundamental way he had not changed at all but they could not put their collective finger on what it was.

Now part of the training for using the Lowenfeld Mosaics was that staff when taking a Mosaic should record the process meticulously. With the help of video recordings, they numbered all the moves.

Slide 20 Here then is the same Mosaic with the moves numbered. Here it was that we found a clue to the staff's concerns. As you can see, the basic style of

approach has not altered.

This enabled the staff to know the limits of what could be achieved as well as where they might try to focus their next piece of work.

6 Slides: 36, 37, 38, 40, 41: I am going to take you through this next series of 6 Mosaics rather rapidly, so that you can catch the main points I wish to demonstrate.

Slide 36 I would like you to take in the general impression of this first Mosaic. (Allow time for this)

Slide 37 This next Mosaic was done three months later. As you can see, the main features, with very slight changes are all in place. The most notable difference is the addition of these two lines.

Slide 38 This Mosaic was made some seven months later. Even a casual look will tell you something has happened. His normal style of approach and manner as well as choice of subject was quite different.

So what was it about his third Mosaic which showed such a radical difference to his first two Mosaics?
We have to go back to what happened to him about six months before he made that Mosaic.

Return to Slide 37 Soon after this second Mosaic was made, the Mosaic maker's keyworker was murdered, and in consequence of this unusual traumatic event, his behaviour deteriorated markedly. The staff made allowances for this, but after six months, they were beginning to wonder if he was taking advantage of their tolerance. I advised them to ask him to do a Mosaic

Slide 38 ...and this was the result. This was meant to be a giraffe, but all the parts were not in their proper positions. You will no doubt remember that it is not remotely like his first two Mosaics either. On the strength of this evidence, and without any prompting from me, the staff understood that he was still suffering from the effects of the trauma.

Slide 39 Three months after that Mosaic, this was the Mosaic he made. He had returned to work on his original themes. but some changes had also occurred.

slide 40 One month later, he was faced with the departure of a much-loved teacher. But he had been prepared for this, and it was hoped that he would not be too much affected by this. This was the Mosaic he made for her. As you can see, he was continuing to work on his previous preoccupations as well as his feelings about her through his use of the Mosaics. (the skirt)

Slide 41 Four months later, this work continued.

Open for questions / discussion.

Announcement:

This paper can be read on a poster board.

For further information and a display of Lowenfeld Mosaic work with the deaf, please visit the Hayfield stand.

