

Introducing Lowenfeld Mosaics in to Clinical Practice

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Presentation

Lay the box of Mosaics above the tray, with a space between to allow for the tray to be rearranged if desired. I usually do this for the first time, so as to make it as convenient for the right-hander as for the left—hander. This arrangement of box and tray may be changed by the Mosaic—maker. But it is important that you consistently present the tray in the landscape position, so that it becomes a decisive and meaningful change for the child when the child changes it to a portrait position.

Depending on the age of the person, and always being sensitive to the response you get to the presentation, you show what is available: that is, you say something like this:

- “Here is a box of coloured pieces, there are five shapes, each shape has six colours”, demonstrating the colours and shapes in the same time, laying them down on the tray in such a way as to show an make clear the mathematical relationship between the shapes, beginning with a red square, followed by a blue diamond, a yellow isosceles (showing bisection of square), a black equilateral and ending with a green scalene (showing bisection of equilateral). To complete the colour demonstration, you mention that “there is also white in all the shapes.”

You will note that I have followed the colour order in which the shapes have been arranged. Order is important because it will enable you to observe the Mosaic-maker’s moves more easily, especially if the Mosaic has been used in a series during treatment.

Whilst you are putting the pieces back in the box, you ask the person to:

- “do something with some of the pieces in the box, anything you like; you can use as many or as few pieces as you like, on this tray: (if it is crucial, here you give the time limit) and finally, say, tell me when you have finished.”

If the child is nervous, do explain that there is no right or wrong way of making a Mosaic; that everyone does something unique to them. This is simply to reassure them, it also happens to be true.

If the child would like you to, the introduction may and should be repeated. Here it may be relevant to point out that whilst it is important to clarify the task, it is NOT useful to say anything which might suggest how or what should be done.

Experiential

Observation And The Total Response

To grasp the Total Response, it is necessary to rid oneself of the habit of abstraction. In a way it is quite simple: just (1) Observe what happens and then (2) Describe what you see.

Now, the Total Response really begins as the person seats herself in front of the Mosaic; observe the manner.

The first question you bear in mind is not only "What is the response" but "How is she responding" - what is required is first the OBSERVATION, then as objective a DESCRIPTION as possible. In order to get the most information on which you will eventually base your thinking, the better you can do this, the more you will get out of the Mosaic.

The next thing to concentrate on is the order of the making of the Mosaic. That is the PROCESS; the MOVEMENT of the colours and shapes, the weaving of the simultaneous relationships in successive moves.

Here you are dealing with the outward expression, in miniature, of a mode of response to life itself. The first and overriding question is the Total Response question:

What is the Response?

What is his attitude towards the request?

How does this person respond in an unfamiliar situation?" (Lowenfeld Mosaic Test, p 154-5) [The administrative, the intuitive, the impulsive, the deliberative, the experimental and the spatial approaches]

How does this person deal with limitations? [In choice of shape (eg no circles), colour (eg no brown or orange) and space (eg can I go over the edge - "you can whatever you like")]

The next Total Response question to bear in mind is:
How is she responding?

For example:

"How does she perceive the task in front of her?"

"How does she deal with this perception?"

"How does she conceive the task?"

"How does she realise the conception?"

The Mosaic questions you should have in mind are:

"How is she managing the two aspects of each piece?";

"How is one piece related to the next?"
"How are the pieces related to the tray space?"

Now, since you have to note all these aspects in one process of observation, you will realise the nature of the task before you.

But even if you only obtain the minimum, you will have gained a unique view of the person in action. With experience, the thinking about the Mosaic process and the Mosaic product will come together as a continuous process in the Observer.

Looking At The Dynamics Of The Handling Of The Pieces

Examples

1. Picks a handful from box but using one piece at a time, keeping stack in hand (closed or open?) - possibly likes to take hold of a small part in a situation in order to get a purchase on the total situation.
2. Picks a handful from box and distributes the Mosaic pieces in a non-deliberate way onto the tray - almost as if to allow the spontaneous grouping to direct the design - more likely to co-operate with the environment and is not frightened of surprises perhaps.

Now I must add a warning about such thinking. The thinking must be linked to other behaviours (Remember the Total Response).

So, in the last example, if you also observed that the Mosaic-maker was repeatedly looking to you before proceeding, you may indeed form the opposite picture: i.e. far from not being afraid of surprises, she might be seeking approval for all her actions, and instead of being co-operative with the environment, she is perhaps a slave to environmental demands.

There are as many ways of handling the Mosaics as there are Mosaics (and each Mosaic Response is unique, that is the only thing I can guarantee). But the number of ways one could describe them in words are limited; limited not only by the size of our verbal vocabulary, but, as we have been made aware through our attempts to describe our own or another's experiential work, by the very nature of verbal description.

What I am really saying is that everything within the Total Response tells you something; the more you are able to include in your picture, the more likely you are to obtain a helpful picture.

How To Look At The Mosaic Product

When looking at a Mosaic, even though you have seen it being made, it is important that you do not assume you know what has been made. "Tell me about what you have made."

Examples: Slide 1 RV's mosaic; train station, train
Slide 2 Pattern vs star; Pattern vs eagle
Slide 3 Pattern, but not believed

So it is important to check with the Mosaic maker before any discussion takes place. And, if eg she says, "cat", don't assume you know what or where the features are: always ask.

Representational or abstract patterns need to be looked at differently:
Representational = content [reality]; Abstract pattern = structure [ibid p151]

Examples of Therapeutic Uses by client at Initial Session: Slides 4 & 5 LB, SG

SLIDE 4: LB

This Mosaic made by a prepubertal girl who was referred by her family doctor because she was overweight, enueretic and unhappy. She was also not doing well at her schoolwork. She was offered an initial appointment to obtain her View and to assess what help our clinic team could offer her.

She built up this simple figure in a relaxed manner and was pleased with the final product. I asked her to tell me what she had made.

She told me it was a person. What kind of person? I asked.

Hmm. I don't know, it doesn't matter.

Could it be someone like you? I asked. Yes, she said.

I then described what the person was made up of, beginning with the top - "Yes, that's the head." It's white, I said. "That's because there's nothing inside," she replied. So you feel blank inside your head. "Hmm" Is that how you feel at school? "Yes, I don't know what the teachers are going on about. I don't understand a word they say."

The arms and legs have got the same colours as the body, I see. Only the blue in the arm and leg is on the opposite side to the same colour in the body. And the same goes for the red and green, I said.

She burst into tears. Haltingly, she explained that she and her mother were walking up the road. She was shocked to suddenly see her father with another woman on his arm come into view. She thought her father had gone to a conference.

This precipitated a parental separation, her father abruptly leaving home, and eventually a divorce. She was devastated. She was not only very fond of her father, but had admired him for the important job he did. She had been proud of him. She

missed him when she was at home with her mother; but she missed her mother whenever she visited with her father. Whoever she was with at the time, she would be angry with that parent.

So that was what the colours in her Mosaic meant. She just wished that her parents were together again and she became distressed and angry whenever she thought about what her father did to the family. She also felt that she did not matter to either of her parents.

SLIDE 5: SG

This Mosaic was made by a teenager, referred on the telephone, to the local clinic by a frantic mother who said her son had been terribly depressed and was now expressing suicidal thoughts. The boy was offered an emergency appointment without any further preliminaries.

Surprisingly he came by himself (I suppose I had expected his mother to have brought him). He seemed very self-contained. He had a quiet and methodical manner in his approach to the Mosaics. He began in the corners and worked systematically in a criss-cross movement, inwards from the four corners, resulting in a complex mirror image, the mirrored half being rotated through 180°. He fitted in pieces in awkward spaces, but not obsessively so, always keeping up the symmetry. The space in the middle was deliberately left. Referring to the colours, he said he wanted the colours separated, not massed.

When he had finished, we contemplated the Mosaic together. When asked about it, he said it had felt like a contracting coffin, with himself in the middle, being squeezed so hard that he had become invisible.

I remember the powerful impression it made on me at the time. In an elaborated exploration of both the Mosaic and the feelings it aroused, he was able to give me a succinct picture of his situation, as he sees it.

He was an only child - here represented by the white space in the middle of the Mosaic. If you look very closely, you can make out two identical rudimentary figures, enclosing that space in the middle. These were metaphorically his parents, who both dote on and neglect him in different ways.

To show you how exactly the Mosaic reflected this boy's situation:

[In an interview with the parents later, I learnt that the father, a young 35, looking very much like the boy's elder brother, was a freelance architect who had his office at the top of a three storey house. The mother was a woman in her 40s, looking more like the boy's grandmother, who always thought she would never have any children and when this boy was born, did not know what to do with him; in fact it precipitated her into a deep depression so that father, who was an architectural student at the time, became the main carer during his first 18 months. She worked freelance in public relations and her office was on the ground floor of their home. The boy had the run of the floor in between.]

To continue where he left off:- In his junior school, he was bullied because of his small stature and slow at learning, but the parents never fully accepted the bullying and put his slow learning down to laziness. He was later sent to a well known academically high powered secondary school, even though he was by then found to be dyslexic and behind academically.

[Again when I saw the parents with him, his mother had only traumatic memories of his early life, for example, she didn't know what to do when he cried and she would hide in the bathroom and stop up her ears. In fact, his father was the one who remembered about his milestones but then only vaguely; and from nursery onwards details of his life was largely provided by the boy himself]

Again to continue where he left off:- He stood out in the secondary school in other ways, but mainly because he did not come from the same social background as most of his classmates. On this account and because he was rather small for his age, he felt he was denigrated and bullied by some of his teachers as well as his peers. The World he made in this first session was indeed bleak : A strong dry wind blowing across a desert, a small figure lying on a narrow ledge of a sand dune; and he knew neither sympathy nor a way out. What was particularly moving was his surprise at the ease with which he was able to talk so openly, the Mosaic having offered him finally a medium of expression he could use.