

Introduction to Lowenfeld and Her Techniques for Expressive Communication

By Thérèse Woodcock

Edited by Oscar Krisen Buros, visiting Professor of Education, University College, University of East Africa, Nairobi, Kenya. Published by The Gryphon Press, Highland Park, New Jersey, USA, 1965

The Lowenfeld Kaleidoblocs. Ages 2.5 and over; ,1958; individual; 1 form ('58)' 2 mimeographed manuals ('58): adults (12 pages), children (9 pages); no data on reliability and validity; no norms, 52s. 6d. (\$11) per set of testing materials, postage extra; specimen set not available; (60) minutes; Margaret Lowenfeld; Badger Tests Co. Ltd. *

References

1. Ames, Louise Bates, and Learned, Janet. "Developmental Trends in Child Kaleidoblock Responses." J Genetic Psychol 84:237-70 Je'54. *(PA 29:4023)
2. Ames, Louise Bates, and Learned, Janet. "Individual Differences in Child Kaleidoblock Responses." J Genetic Psychol 85:3-38 S '54. *(PA 29:5686)
3. Lowenfeld, Margaret. "Concerning Unrealized Factors in International Attitudes and Their Bearing on International Health." Int. Mental Health Res. Newsl. 4(3-4): 5-7 '62. *

T.R. Miles, Professor of Psychology, University College of North Wales, Bangor, Wales.

The material for this test comprises 26 painted pieces of wood - cubes, half cubes, triangular and rectangular blocks, and three special shapes with flat bases and curved tops. The adult test has four sections. In the first, the subject is invited to use the blocks to

construct whatever he pleases; sections 2-4 consist of problems of varying kinds, e.g., building the blocks into familiar children's objects, reconstructing a particular arrangement, etc. The children's test has a similar first section, together with a second section of somewhat easier problems.

Work on this test is still only in the initial stages and there has so far been no systematic standardisation and follow-up. Its great merits, however, in the opinion of the reviewer, are first that, within the framework of certain standardised conditions, it allows for the study of Spontaneous behaviour, and secondly that it includes a genuine attempt to study imaginative ability. Psychometrics has given us plenty of statistics, but all too often these statistics relate to performance at fatuous and uninspired test items in highly artificial conditions. No doubt much in the present test depends on the clinical skill of the tester, and, for the first section in particular, worthwhile standardisation may turn out to be difficult, as in the Rorschach test, but Lowenfeld has at least offered a clear challenge to the more orthodox proponents of so-called "intelligence" and "personality" tests.

Plenty of questions remain on the theoretical side. In the introductory section of the instructions we are told. "The task of psychology, in the detailed study of human personality, is to invent methods of estimating the component elements and their structure in my given individual Lowenfeld is not the first thinker who has wanted to explain the characteristics of big things in terms of the behaviour of smaller or more "elemental" ones. If she is right in trying to do so, then the breakthrough will come when the appropriate smaller things have been named (as, for instance, in the case of oxygen). However, in view of the variety of responses which human nervous systems make possible, one wonders whether this approach (which, incidentally, is not very different from that of the factor analysts) is feasible for psychologists studying personality. Indeed, it is not clear that Lowenfeld is doing more than paying service to it. Since there is no obvious logical connexion between her reference to "elements" and the actual test items which follow. One wonders if a link-up with the theories of Melanie Klein might in fact turn out to be more promising; if this is right, more could possibly have been done to study the subject's responses to people, e.g., by the introduction of shapes having a greater resemblance to

parts of the human body. This, however, is perhaps to ask for a different kind of test.

In the reviewer's opinion the Lowenfeld Kaleidoblocs have considerable potentialities. Those who use them, however, will need both flexibility and imagination - and perhaps a mentality similar to that of Lowenfeld herself.

George Westby, Professor of Psychology, University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire, University of Wales, Cardiff, Wales.

This is a fascinating test though manifestly still in an experimental stage of development. The Lowenfeld Kaleidoblocs were clearly inspired by a commendable respect for the child's right not only to play his way to the development of his personality but to learn his cognitive alphabets as far as possible by spontaneous experiment and with accompanying film. It is clear that, in the hands of an enthusiast, such a set of brightly coloured wooden blocks embodying basic mathematical relationships will be an aid to exploring the natural resources of ability in the perception and manipulation forms in space and will be a help in developing insight into basic mathematical relationships. It is not easy to see much use for the blocks in, as the author claims, "professional guidance" and "personnel management" where prediction is involved. No evidence of such value is presented in the present cyclostyled manuals. There is also a footnote to the effect that no standardisation on data are as yet available and a further warning that "all the statements made about it (the test) are tentative and based upon preliminary findings" (presumably at the Institute of Child Psychology Ltd. and at the Gesell Institute of Child Development where the test has been used).

There is no published evidence shown to the reviewer of the tests used in the form recommended for adults, which is in four separate sections. The task in the first is similar to mosaic building, the construction being simply, "Make whatever you like with these blocks." The second section consists of nine "problems" of a type similar to mazes which have been used to test perceptual and spatial ability. They have differing time limits. The following is typical of a five-minute task. Four large triangular blocks are presented and put together as

a triangle solid block as a demonstration. The instruction is as follows. "This you see is a symmetrical solid block with smooth edges. It can be placed with the broader or narrower side downwards. I want you to see in how many different symmetrical smooth-edged blocks you can arrange these four triangles." There are 21 possible arrangements. The third section consists of a variety of tasks again of varied time impacts. They include the making of a person and a common object such as a table or chair from the blocks. In section four all the blocks have to be used as in a jigsaw to make a solid rectangular block.

The children's form uses the same blocks but is in two sections only. The first consists of free building and the second of much simpler problems than in the adult form including, as in Kohs' blocks, the copying of geometrical and colour arrangements.

The group of tasks may well be considered as tools for research in the field of spatial, mathematical attachment, but little criticism can usefully be offered until, by properly designed experimental investigation, they have been compared with alternative methods of achieving similar ends.

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We all understand that therapeutic work has to do with the personal experiences of the children and young people we see; we accept this without question. Most of us try to understand their present through assembling a picture of their past. usually through reports which have come with the child by talking to the adult figures who are most closely associated with them. and / or by asking the child to tell us directly. So the second point about therapeutic work is that it is work which is centred on expression, communication and understanding of personal experiences: thus the means by which these personal experiences are expressed and in what or whose terms these expressions are understood. become central to the therapeutic enterprise.

Let us start with personal experiences. I will start by reading from Lowenfeld's own description of her post WWI experiences:

Read from World Technique p1 - 2

I would like you to keep in mind two key points from the passage I have just read out to you. These are.-

1. Lowenfeld's scepticism as to the possibilities of language as a tool of interpersonal understanding and
2. her natural approach to a solution was through observation and trying it out before formulating her theories.

I propose to follow Lowenfeld's example and begin with personal experience. your personal experience, and observation, your observations.

Description of Personal Experience

Now let us look at the nature of ordinary experience. Let us try to recall one of the more recent experiences of each and every one in this group. Have you pen and paper?"

Would each of you try to describe in words your experience of the moment of your departure from home this morning.

[Time to write]

After Written Description of Personal Experience

You will have noticed that whilst the experience took one moment of your time: the act of describing the experience took much longer.

1. **Did you notice how you went about recalling the experience?**
2. **Some of you may have encountered an immediate problem: what was it?**

3. **Do you recall how you selected the moment as the beginning of your experience?**
4. **For those of you who didn't have any hesitation. what was it which enabled you not to have this problem? (Emotion)**
 - Shall we just go round and each of you say a little more about: [5] how you went about describing your experience
5. **How you went about describing your experience**

The first question I wish to ask you all is:

[5a] What exactly came into your mind when you were doing this exercise?

[5aa] Expectations [what does she want from me? what is the purpose of the task? what is the right or a good response, that would not show me in a bad light?]

Images, Sensations, Feelings, Unconnected thoughts etc

So what looks like a simple request may arouse responses of differing complexity.

The next question I wish to ask is:

[5b] What do you notice about your description?

[5ba] The **Global** and **Multidimensional** Nature the **Simultaneity** and **Instantaneousness** of Experience

[5bb] as distinct from the **Linearity** and **Timebound** nature of verbal description: the necessity to choose to put one word before another. the necessity for obeying rules of word order.

Verbal Communication

Let us for a moment think about **Verbal Language**. How do we use words to express ourselves? Whether the words are voiced or written, words follow one upon another, forming sentences.

[1] It is built up in a linear way.

- There are **rules of grammar and logic which govern our conversations with one another.**
- The words we use are **standardised, general and public.**
- The **rules can be looked up in a Grammar;**
- **The words can be looked up in a dictionary.**

On the other hand:

- We are **never taught the rules of logic**, except as an adult discipline of learning.
- We are **never taught the rules of grammar before we have acquired the use of our native tongue.** In fact we now know that children show a grasp of certain fundamental rules of language before they are formally taught it.
- Furthermore with our mother tongue, we have usually acquired a sizable vocabulary before we are introduced to reading and long after that to dictionary use or learning of grammatical rules.

So in reality none of us began learning our mother tongue through formal means.

[2] Secondly, although we often use the same words.

- **Does the word have the same meaning for all of us or even?**
- **Does the same word mean the same thing at all times for the same individual?**

Just now each of you described one moment of a unique, but perhaps mundane experience in your life. And one thing is immediately clear: **verbal language requires one to prioritise the elements of experience.** Some people would say that, even for articulate adults like ourselves, verbal description of an experience can never fully capture the

complex nature the immediacy of an experience. Some might say, it actually distorts it.

Experience & Expressive Communication

So this was Lowenfeld's first discovery. Lowenfeld came to realise

[1] that **experience is global, multidimensional and simultaneous.**

[2] that using language is an unsatisfactory way of thinking about our experiences.

[3] that our thoughts and feelings can never be adequately conveyed by the use of language.

So the question becomes: **Is there some other way we have, that we ALL have, for us to reflect upon our experiences to express our thoughts and feelings?**

Of course, our normal mode of expression is through our **behaviour**, through **action**. This **behaviour, this acting out**, what does this mean in terms of our inner thoughts and feelings.

As we have just demonstrated, verbal language is clearly unsatisfactory, particularly from a child's point of view, and not simply because an infant or a young child does not have command of verbal language. **So is there another way of accessing our thoughts and feelings about our experiences, children's and our own?**

Lowenfeld thinks we have and her ideas about this have come from watching children play. That, in turn led her to devise expressive mediums through which we can more easily and clearly express ourselves, both for children and for adults.

As personal experience is the key to Lowenfeld's thinking and therapeutic techniques, I would like to introduce both the Lowenfeld Mosaics and the World Technique through your own personal experience of them.

When Dr Lowenfeld first saw children playing, often using miniature toys in the sandtray. she noticed with interest how absorbed they were in their activity; how particular they were about the placement of the toys or Mosaic pieces; how the detail mattered to them; how thoughtful they were about their own productions.

But these were observations made from outside the experience. What was it like for the person who was making the Mosaic or the World? My own experience of the Mosaic has been alluded to in the Handbook.

Experiential: Mosaics and Worlds

Some of you here today, may or may not have had some personal experience of making a Mosaic and / or a World. Irrespective of this. I would like you all to start with the Mosaic, for a particular reason and that is a clinical reason:

- When I first meet a child. I usually ask the child to do a Mosaic first and then a World. **[a]** This sets the scene for the Lowenfeld Approach. **[b]** It also highlights to the child two distinct ways of expression which are not usually included in the general notion of Play; and **[c]** because each medium allows me to observe something different.

Thus this experiential recreates for you the sense of how a child or adolescent might experience a first session.

This morning we shall be making a Mosaic and in the afternoon we shall be making a World each. In both. the procedure would be the same:

People divide into pairs,

- **One makes a Mosaic or World, whilst the other observes the manner and process in which the Mosaic or World is created.**

For today. I would like you just

- **To pay special attention to your own reactions or thoughts and feelings. both when you are the maker and when you are the observer.**
- **do not make notes during the process of either observation or the experiential. simply allow the experience to take place.**

This is an important part of the experiential work which you will also need to do at each successive experiential session. However, **in future, a recording of the manner, process and product would also be required from the observer.**

You have until to do the Mosaic. Apportion half the time to each person. The observer should keep check on the time, remember to allow for clearing up. You will have to decide between you who does what first. then switch roles. You might also decide whether to give yourselves time to make notes afterwards.