

A study of Nonverbal communication in Psychotherapy by Dr Margaret Lowenfeld



In the main, the theoretical basis of current child psychiatry has been built up upon material gathered in the analysis of adults and adapted to the treatment of children. A central feature of both spheres of work is the importance laid upon verbalisation.

During the past thirty years a great deal of valuable information has in this way been gathered, concerning certain aspects of early human experience and processes of development. To this approach there are, however, equally clear limitations – since small children cannot talk, interpretations are per force inferential. They can moreover only apply to those areas of experience which have come to light in the analyses of adults. Moreover, owing to the dominance of the basic theories, derived also from adults, material, should it appear in treatment of children, which lies outside the range of these theories will be interpreted within their range and so become lost or misinterpreted.

Furthermore, since children are unable to use words for the expression of their experience, either to themselves or to their therapist before the years approximately of 7/8 they can only assume that what has happened and is happening to and in them is a universal experience and order their behaviour accordingly.

The procedures which it is the object of this application to select, arrange, describe and present for publication, has as its aim the establishment of direct contact with children: and the devising of methods by which their thoughts, ideas, experiences and emotions can be given direct expression by them and be directly understood by their therapists.

This work is unique. It has been carried out with children of all ages, from all social classes, and suffering from every variety of disturbance, for thirty years. As conclusions were arrived at and formulated they were built into the current techniques and modes of therapy. Application for assistance in presenting the methods and the conclusions of this form of therapy has been delayed until two landmarks had been reached:

- The arrival at maturity, (successful work, marriage and/or parenthood) of sufficient number of the children treated to make it possible to match the view theoretically held against the reality outcome.
- Successful treatment of some adults by the same means and using the same techniques in order to trace the persistence into adult life of the phenomena observed in children, and to check the suitability and effectiveness for treatment of adults of the same procedures as are used with children.

What is sought, therefore, is assistance in describing the work itself, selecting typical case material for serial presentation: description of the theories concerning early cognitive processes and their influence upon the development of normal and disturbed personality: and description and discussion of certain specific tools used in the techniques of this work.

The work itself is unique and has been in operation at the Institute of Child Psychology, London, and by the principal investigator in private consultation practice for thirty years.

It has three specific and unique features:

- a. A specialised relation between child and therapist.
- b. The provision of a specially designed Out Patient environment for children, within which therapy is carried on.
- c. The design, development, and use of a certain specialised tools viz.
 - i. The world Technique.
 - ii. The Lowenfeld Mosaic Test.
 - iii. The Lowenfeld Kaleidoblocs.
 - iv. The Newspaper Game.

All sessions with children, either in the I.C.P. or with children and adults seen in private by the principal investigator have been recorded in detail, as has the results of their spontaneous use of a – c.

What is now proposed is:

1. To make selection of typical material from case sheets and record it comparatively and seriatim as it arose.
2. To describe the insights that have been derived from experience of this material which relate to certain components of early experience which do not appear in other methods of therapy, and which have profound effect upon the development of personality.
3. To describe, particularly in its international and cross cultural aspects, the L.M.T., now widely used in many fields.
4. To make a preliminary technical description of the Lowenfeld Kaleidoblocs, hitherto not developed or described owing to lack of time.
5. To make preliminary description of the Newspaper Game, with studies of its clinical use.
6. To collect together material already published on the World Technique and make a full description of it and of its clinical use.
7. To write briefly about the relation between material brought to light through use of these techniques and the development of psychosomatic conditions in children.
8. To describe the form of psychotherapy with children in which the material being presented has arisen, and to indicate the ranges of experience opened up by the use of these techniques. These are hitherto unexplored and unexplorable regions, owing to the absence of instruments and methods through the use of which they could be expressed and realised.