

## THE USE OF LOWENFELD MOSAICS IN PROJECTIVE PLAY THERAPY

by

Thérèse Woodcock©

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### Individual Treatment Cases

No doubt you would like to learn something about how using the Mosaics work out in practice. Today I would like to present a few treatment cases in some detail.

#### Portrait as "Painted" in the First & Last Mosaics

SLIDE 14                      This was a Mosaic made by a 15 year old boy on his first visit. When he had completed his Mosaic, I ascertained from him that *the figure featured a face within a frame of hair, a sweater and a pair of trousers.*

At first, he told me that it was 'a little boy' but after a pause he changed it to 'a boy', then after a pause, 'anybody'. He continued to change his mind, saying next that it 'doesn't matter', followed by 'a person' then back to 'a boy', finally after some time, deciding that it was afterall 'a girl' and he started to change the Mosaic trousers into a skirt.

Upon enquiry, he explained that 'He', indicating the Mosaic figure, could be living anywhere, seemingly having forgotten that he last said it was a girl. Quietly, without any show of emotion, as though in resignation, he added that 'it doesn't matter where he lived really'.

You will note that notwithstanding the power of his verbal communication, what he depicted as a person gives a veritable picture of the absence of a personality. In the image he has created, there is visibly no substance inside the clothes. Furthermore, its placement gave the impression of a puppet suspended in mid air, to the side of centre stage, as though to the side of, or sidelined.

To unpack the Total Response of this first session, let us look closely again at the whole process, leading to the product and our

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subsequent conversation about it so far. Remember the Mosaic is a self-portrait in action. His confusion about the gender of the personality depicted is quite clear; equally clear is the fact that he was thinking about himself, is also clear from his immediate reversion back to "he". Of course, this is not simple guess work on my part. Held in my mind is his personal history: at the time I thought it was relevant to recall to mind, his parents', his mother's in particular, wish for a girl.

You will also have noticed that at one point, he said that "it doesn't matter" - this is the second point. This came in the middle of the conversation about the person depicted by the Mosaic-maker. So there is not just confusion but a certain feeling, a feeling of despair, that whichever it was, it would still perhaps not have mattered.

He then informed me that 'it doesn't matter where he lived really'. This is a clear reference to his personal history, which was that from a very early age, as soon as he exhibited signs of difficulties with language, the parents had not only half-heartedly implemented any recommendations by professionals, they were increasingly vociferous in demanding that his language difficulties at home had become so intolerable that only a boarding school placement would solve the problem.

Eventually, these wishes were acceded to and the local authority education department funded this solely on educational grounds, because behaviourally he had not presented any problems to the parents or the school. He was sent away to boarding school at the age of eight. He was at home for all the school holidays, and when it was time to return to school, his reluctance usually caused the parents to seek help to return him to school. At school, his progress was painfully slow.

When he was rising sixteen, he finally came back to mainstream schooling and the school found him such an anxious boy that he was referred to our Service. But clearly the feeling

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that he wasn't wanted was still very much with him, and I was struck by how precisely this personal viewpoint was expressed.

For various reasons, he was unable to attend regularly or come very often. After a few sessions, his need to spend time catching up on his schoolwork was making attendance increasingly difficult, so we agreed that as he felt he had become less hampered by anxiety and more able for him to carry on on his own, he would do a last Mosaic. I might add that he had not done any Mosaics after that first one you had just seen.

SLIDE 15        He told me this was a skier and he was happy with what he had made. Would people like to comment on the difference in the representation of the personality in action between the two portraits?

You will have noticed that the figure is now not only more solid, but more centrally placed but at the same level within the tray space. The head is now framed by a red woolley hat, keeping the head warm (that is, depiction of input from external reality: from the school and perhaps marginally from our time together). The body is solidly blue, although the stance is a trifle stiff and awkward. The ski is not only short and therefore not truly functional, but looked like an extension of the arm and hands. The skis are black, so at least differentiated from his person.

To appreciate the precision with which the portrait has been painted, one must be attentive to all the details. In the world of external reality, the school reports that he was making progress in his efforts to catch up, slowly but progress nevertheless. The effort he was putting in involved spending all his spare time doing the schoolwork set him, often staying on for help from his teachers, hence even an after school appointment fortnightly, monthly or even termly would still be difficult for him to attend.

The most memorable session I had with him was the time when he drew a whale: at first it was very faintly outlined, later his pencil marks were bolder. I ventured to say that whales were

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very interesting creatures. They live deep in the ocean, and they communicate with each other with sounds, but a whole sentence for them would take a very long time in our way of thinking, so they are thought by us humans to be very, very, very slow indeed, but for whales that's normal. And I added that there are people who are naturally slow, just like whales; for these people, being slow is just right, that's the way they are. I have never forgotten the smile that he gave me then.

But you can see that although there was progress, it was no miracle, the Mosaic simply but surely reflecting where he was at the time of making it.

Mosaics Made in Two Different Moods

SLIDE 16                      This Mosaic was made by a 14 year old girl at her first session. Her very first words to me were that she was feeling very depressed and miserable that day.

Note that the Mosaic is made on one side of the tray only. An irregular space can be seen inside the linked Mosaic pieces. Note also the colours used and how the shapes & colours are disposed in relationship to each other.

SLIDE 17                      On her next visit a week later, she insisted on doing another Mosaic, to show me that she was in a happy and relaxed mood in contrast to the previous occasion. She emphasized to me that this day she was more her usual self. The suggestion was that this was her true self.

As you can see, the Mosaic has now expanded to cover the whole tray, reflecting her expansive mood. And certainly, the overall impression is much brighter.

What I now want to draw your attention to is the space in the middle. That too has expanded. So that although the mood has dramatically changed, the underlying structure remains unaltered. Thus, though she felt that she had more truly



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represented herself in her second Mosaic; from her Mosaic response, it is clear that though indeed her mood had changed, she herself was fundamentally the same person, someone whose very centre was hollow.

I always find the consistency shown by people's mosaics quite remarkable.

Changed Product, Same Process

SLIDE 18                      This Mosaic was made by a profoundly deaf young man with multiple psychological problems.

I wish only to draw your attention to the process by which this Mosaic had been created. I have numbered the first 5 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. However, the people who were working with him 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 one of the things I had suggested to the professionals when taking a Mosaic was to record the process meticulously. With the help of video recordings, they numbered all the moves.

SLIDE 20                      Here 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.

Healing the Split Self

SLIDE 21                      The teenage boy who made this Mosaic came under protest. He insisted that he had no problems and

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could not see any purpose in coming to see a shrink. He had nothing to talk about.

I suggested that instead of talking maybe we could start with something different, and then introduced him to the Mosaics. He found himself drawn to playing with the pieces and eventually to making this person.

He told me that there were shoulder pads in the jacket, that people who wear them feel big and that, in turn, made them feel great. I wondered whether he or his friends owned such clothing. He said he would like to. I wondered whether the person he had depicted could be himself. He grinned.

I then pointed to the space down the middle and said that it looked like this person was split in half. He protested that it was a mistake, that he would make another one to show me what he really meant to do.

SLIDE 22                      Leaving his first Mosaic to the side of him, I gave him another piece of paper on which to make his second Mosaic. Without a single glance at his finished Mosaic, he recreated the figure, carefully overlapping some white pieces with the blue.

Whilst acknowledging the difference, I pointed out the fact that the gap between the two sides of the body seemed to be covered by white pieces, thus the effect is the same and not truly affecting the split underneath.

He looked at his Mosaic in silence for sometime and when he spoke, it was a question. The question was: "Could I come a few times ..... just to see what happens?", he hastily added.

In fact his sessions enabled him to realise what his dilemma was, why he was unable to move forward in life. Once he realised what the task was, he had no need for further sessions. He felt he could manage by himself.

With adolescents, unless one thought there would be issues of safety involved, one should always go with the wish to be independent.

### Shape vs Colour

The next Mosaic has to do with observation of how the particular qualities of the Mosaics are being used, within the Total Response, can be revealing. It also demonstrates how meticulous attention to the Mosaic process can provide valuable information.

The Mosaic was produced quite naturally, without any need for coercion, nor even persuasion, by a truculent eight year old boy who was said to have produced no schoolwork during the three to four years he had been at school. He was also said to be emotionally immature and unable to make friends.

Let me now describe the Mosaic process:

SLIDE 23        After my usual demonstration, he picked up all four red squares from one side of the box and placed them along the bottom edge of the tray. He told me they were 'tiles'. He took out three more red squares from the other compartment, centred them above the previous row and now said they were 'floor tiles'.

As he said this, he took out four blue squares [i.e. the next pieces in the row of squares] and put them at the ends of the two rows of red squares. He picked out three more blue squares [i.e. repeating his first two moves] and placed these above the second row, followed by a yellow square from the four yellow squares he had next picked out from the box but retained in his hand [i.e. again the next set of squares in the same first compartment) .

He now thought it looked like a pyramid and began putting the second and third yellow in the fourth row. Here he paused and said that it now looked more like a house or a wall.

He next put the fourth yellow to straddle the previous two and finally decided that it looked more like a pyramid, whereupon he picked up the remaining red and blue squares to finish off the ends of the last two rows, discovering as he did so, that he needed one more square to make the top of the pyramid and he chose another yellow square.

He looked enormously pleased with his production, sufficient for him to look into the box again and pick out a new shape, the isosceles, a red isosceles triangle. That too was a pyramid.

He picked out a few more red isosceles triangles and began experimenting with them and eventually arrived at an enlarged isosceles triangle. This too was a pyramid, these are pyramids in the distance, he told me, as he picked up a yellow isosceles, placing it on the bottom edge of the tray (that is, ending on the edge where he had begun his Mosaic, but finishing with the colour that he had used to complete his first shape).

Let us now examine the process more carefully. Let us look at his thought process in relation to his choice and placement of the Mosaic pieces.

We can see that he started with what I had began my demonstration with in terms of the Mosaic pieces (red square) and then proceeded to follow the line of least resistance through the same compartment in the box. However, he showed that he knew where to get some more of the same (moved to the other side of the box), so he did follow the instructions quite closely, i.e. whatever was stopping him from doing his schoolwork, it was not because he could not pay attention (also later, quickly remembering where the isosceles triangles were and the fact that the shape was that of a pyramid).

The next point of interest is his thought process whilst building the first shape. Whilst the actual process of building this shape required very little thinking, his ideation process was moving from one idea to another in rapid succession.

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Once he had changed the shape he was using, he seemed stuck with the same idea (the pyramid) and eventually was stuck with that shape as well.

What does this tell us about this boy? Does it shed any light on his inability to produce schoolwork?

Clearly, as he had managed to produce Mosaic work, he had demonstrated that *he was capable of producing some work*. And we saw earlier how he *must have paid some attention* to remember that the same coloured shape could be found in two different places (also re the red isosceles).

The Mosaic work, however, has shown equally clearly that his perceptual skills are unable to keep up with his ideational flights; that is he seemed unable to take on the multidimensional aspect of the task. He worked linearly, that is, whilst his mind was on the ideational possibilities, he used the same shape; he did not make use of the shapes to achieve the idea, the ideas suggested themselves to him as he put down the same shape, using the colours along the line of least resistance as suggested by the way the pieces were distributed in the box and following my demonstration.

Secondly, his thoughts do not reveal any meaningful connections or narrative formation: they are simply named objects which came into his head, whilst the Mosaic process continued inexorably in the same vein. Thus, the perceptual skills are not harnessed to the thinking; they seem to be dissociated.

What the Mosaic process shows, therefore, is that *his relationship difficulties are at a profound level*.

Thirdly, and this is of equal importance, is the fact that he WAS able to change - the moment when he made the connection between the shape of the isosceles triangle and the shape of the pyramid was that moment. However, as soon as that happened, he seemed to have been unable to take it forward. He



was then stuck with the same idea AND the same shape. Furthermore, the colour he ended his Mosaic with was the colour with which he ended his first completed shape which was also the time and place where he had made the change of shape, from squares to isosceles. Had he too identified that as an important moment? But somehow, for whatever reason, he was unable to take forward any learning.

### A TREATMENT SERIES

#### SLIDE 42 - 53

To demonstrate the importance and value of going through the Mosaic Work in a series, I would now like to just show you a Treatment series of twelve mosaics, made by a boy during a 27 month period, from the first Mosaic to the termination of treatment. He was nine and a half years old at the start of treatment. I have entitled this series:

#### The Emergence of Self

The first three Mosaics form a discrete sequence. The Mosaics depict three different means of Transport.

SLIDE 42                      This is his first Mosaic and it is an aeroplane. You will note that it is made entirely of white pieces, and using all the shapes except for the scalene.

SLIDE 43                      A week later, its a freight-carrying steam train. There are passengers inside the train, with luggage on top. He had used other coloured squares, but insisted that I coloured them all red or blue as directed.

SLIDE 44                      Next week: it's a passenger ship - the ring is "to save people who might have fallen into the rough ocean". The same injunction regarding the colours, was repeated. It is the first Mosaic in which he had utilised all the shapes.

There are four Mosaics in the next sequence, covering a period of six months. They were all patterns. There was a

gradual widening time gap between the occasions when he would choose to do a Mosaic.

SLIDE 45                      Its a symmetrical pattern: its all white, like his first Mosaic, the aeroplane. He systematically used two pieces of the same shape at a time, to create the symmetry. It is placed on the left side of the tray, leaving a blank space on the right side of the tray.

SLIDE 46 & 47

Its all in one colour, but this time in blue. Its placed centrally and also a symmetrical pattern, but with a difference, introducing the idea of two points of view. He said that:

46 =From one side of the tray, you can see a picture of a plane with a cat above; and

47 [=46 upside down]= from the other side of the tray, you can see a boat above a man.

Retrospectively then, the two sides had been prefigured in the previous Mosaic by its position to one side of the tray.

But, from the Total Response point of view, the boat seen from another point of view becomes a plane; what unites them is that they are both carriers. And, they are further linked to the fact that an aeroplane and a passenger ship have appeared previously in his earlier Mosaics.

More interestingly perhaps is the first visual appearance of living creatures: a cat and a man. Furthermore, viewed from above, the man could be seen simultaneously as a cat.

Note therefore both the simultaneity (as well as across time: that is over a number of sessions) and the multidimensional nature of the Mosaics in terms of ideas, the use of colour and space.

SLIDE 48                      Another symmetrical pattern. Two further innovations: [1] the introduction of a new colour = yellow, and [2] he had turned the tray round from its customary position before

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making his Mosaic. (This also shows the importance of having a consistent way of presenting the Mosaic box and tray.)

[1] It seems that the ability to unite the two sides into one central symmetry has also produced a new colour, yellow.

[2] And he is beginning to be an active participant with, as opposed to a passive recipient of, what the environment presents to him. (His earlier attempts were confined to *asking me* to achieve the changes, when he asked me to colour in some shapes in another colour from the actual mosaic chosen.

SLIDE 49 & 50

In his next Mosaic, the theme of the two points of view within the one pattern was elaborated further.

49 = From one side, the yellow and red, he said, could be seen as two birds on a branch with blossom;

50 = from the other, its a face - eyes, nose, and blue earrings, "like Mummy."

Note that all the colours have now been used together in one Mosaic.

The next two Mosaics refer to Reality. Four months later.

SLIDE 51 This Mosaic depicts an aerial view of a passenger boat on its way back to England from the Isle of Wight, which is in reality quite a short journey. One of the blue scalenes is the Captain, there are people talking and the black pieces depict falling rain. Remember, the idea of the boat linked to a man had occurred in an earlier Mosaic. This time, he was actually remembering his holiday with his father.

He helped me colour his Mosaic and as you can see, introduced some non-Mosaic features (painting lines down the middle of the squares) into his work.

Here might be a good time to mention the fact that I ask the child's permission to draw round, colour and keep their Mosaics. I tell them that it is helpful to me to be able to remember what they had done and doing it this way there will also be a

permanent record. In fact, the other message I also intend to give is that I think what they have done is valuable.

They usually agree, and often, as we converse beyond the Mosaic, I begin to draw round and colour the Mosaic in their presence. Thus sometimes I get help with putting the pieces back in the box, (which is another opportunity to observe how well their spatial memory functions, as well as a bonus for me timewise).

What this boy did, however, was to alter the image imposed by the Mosaic shapes. He was showing me that he was no longer entirely subject to the will of others or his environment.

SLIDE 52                      A year later, he made a plan of his school. Note the features he had highlighted. *The yellow square in the corner is the Barn where the athletics equipment was kept* (this gives the notion that the yellow is associated with the physical body and that the idea of being equipped for movement is present).

*The blue equilateral triangle nearby is the entrance to the dining hall* (so now we also have the notion of access to food and nourishment: you might also have remembered that blue was associated with the man and the boat as well as Mummy).

SLIDE 53                      Four months later, he was ready to be discharged, as this next Mosaic would show.

This Mosaic he entitled MYSELF. To explain the significance of the identical figures holding hands, I will need to return to the beginning, when he was first referred by his mother because of problems she was having with his father regarding his access to his children.

Before father left the matrimonial home, relations between the parents were very bad. His father laid the major blame for the breakdown of the marriage on this boy's soiling, with his

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consequent dislike of the boy. Father's treatment of this boy, was harsh in the extreme, attacking the very core of this child's dignity.

For example, he used to get so exasperated with the boy that he would rub the boy's face with his soiled pants. Naturally, the son was reluctant to visit his father.

By the time of this Mosaic, his relationship with his father had improved. His soiling had cleared up and he seemed confident that he would be able to manage in the future without resorting to that particular way of dealing with emotionally charged situations. He had also formed a positive relationship with his mother's new partner.

What this Mosaic portrays is the fact that he can now be Himself in both households.

Everyone, most importantly the child himself, was in accord that it was time for the discharge from treatment. I was later told that when he was asked why he came to see me, he had replied: "I went for me, for Myself."