

Reviews

'WORDS' AND 'SYMBOLS'

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'Single, potent words for navigating life's struggles and joys' is the description of WORDS. Presented as a boxed set of 100 laminated cards in a small, square and beautifully designed tin, WORDS is one of the most apparently simple tools produced by Innovative Resources, but continues the expansion of resources for human services workers, educators and a range of other professionals. The companion tool, SYMBOLS, is in all respects presented in a similar manner, but in place of words provides a set of symbols described as 'Simple, powerful icons for creating change-oriented conversations'. Like the other resources available from this publisher, each set includes a booklet with a multitude of ideas for using the tool.

I found both tools more subtle in their presentation than others I have used or reviewed. I noticed this in particular because I frequently use Innovative Resources tools, as well as other resources, for teaching and learning purposes and most are immediately attractive due to their colour and graphic design attributes. However, each card in these two sets is uncluttered, containing only a word or symbol on a muted background. There is no avoiding the impact, nowhere for the eye to wander, as one contemplates these cards and the potential of intimate connections to their meanings.

In this sense my initial reaction to both tools was that these are for adults, perhaps those who tend to introversion like myself. There is something quiet, but penetrating, about these tools that may not easily allow for preliminary jokes or asides. They may also rely to some extent on the capacity to think in the abstract and be comfortable manipulating language and symbols. Even as I sit writing this, I wonder what the card containing the word 'alone' really means, though it is merely sitting on the top of the pile in its smooth, intriguing tin.

I suspect these tools will challenge in an immediate sense, but will also allow exploration and communication in depth for those who want a therapeutic tool that at first sight is straightforward. Certainly neither card set requires any explanation — they are precisely what they appear to be: 'words' and 'symbols'. But the range of uses, either

separately or in combination, enable conversations with breadth and depth that draw attention to the inner thoughts, creativity and sense of self that are essential in therapeutic relationships. These tools may be particularly useful in creating new or alternative stories for those wanting to pursue narrative therapy approaches. Equally important is the development of symbolic language and both WORDS and SYMBOLS are constructed such that children and young people could use them for practising or rehearsing the language that can encapsulate their thoughts, or the reverse — developing and rehearsing the thoughts and ideas beyond a single word or symbol.

The SYMBOLS tool uses single graphics that are presented as little sketches of items drawn from everyday life from a boot to a butterfly, but also include an anchor, a cross and other items that may carry more challenge in terms of their symbolism. This tool, like WORDS, was developed by Linda Espie and Russel Deal who quote John B S Haldene as saying: 'In fact, words are well adapted for description and the arousing of emotion but for many kinds of precise thought other symbols are much better'.

These resources have immediate application in a variety of settings from schools to the development of expressive writing; from individual conversations and therapeutic applications to group work and the exploration of values and social relationships. While their presentation is done with quiet sophistication, I believe both sets of cards will be powerful in their application.

Postscript:

I used the SYMBOLS cards in the process of demonstrating 'thin' and 'thick' narrative for a Narrative Therapy teaching seminar recently. Working in pairs and threesomes, the students chose two cards each and created a brief narrative to explain the reason for choosing each card. A little later they again contemplated their two cards and created a 'thick' narrative that extended and deepened their narratives; in the process practising questions that might assist one another in 'thickening' narratives. SYMBOLS proved an excellent choice for this exercise!

Reviewed by:

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