

## Review

Jan Sellers and Bernard Moss, *Learning with the Labyrinth: Creating Reflective Space in Higher Education*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 246 pp. ISBN 978-1-137-39383-8, £24.99.

**Reviewed by:** Bronwen Gray, Quaker Chaplain, The Retreat York, Heslington Road, York, UK.  
Email: [bgray@theretreatyork.org.uk](mailto:bgray@theretreatyork.org.uk)

Sellers and Moss bring their extensive experience of the labyrinth, and learning, to take us on a journey of exploration so that the huge potential of this ancient – yet contemporary – path can unfold as the reader turns the pages.

This book is structured in four parts, which guide the reader through labyrinth theory and practice in the context of higher education. The book covers a range of labyrinth related information, from the detail of design and cost issues, to their many and varied uses, for example to deepen reflection and explore contemplative approaches.

Although as the title suggests, the book is intended for people working in education, its helpful general information and testimonies from a wide range of contributors will be ideal material for any health care chaplain considering labyrinth use in their own setting.

Jan Sellers is a leading labyrinth expert who is currently an Associate Tutor at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre; she was formerly the University of Kent's first Creative Learning Fellow. She co-authored *Working with the Labyrinth: Paths for Exploration* (Sewell and Sellers 2012). Bernard Moss is Professor Emeritus of Social Work Education and Spirituality at Staffordshire University and co-authored *Spirituality and Social Work* (Holloway and Moss 2010).

In the introduction Sellers describes the labyrinth as a “place of deep reflection, of calm and contemplation; a wellspring for creativity; a place to connect with our deepest selves” (p. 2). For any reader, like me, working in health care chaplaincy rather than in a higher education setting, this is hopefully encouragement enough to see the potential in the labyrinth – and the book – for its application to other settings. As Sellers writes (p. 6) of the

examples of labyrinth use shared in the book, many are highly adaptable to different contexts, and we are told that “hospitals and health related organisations were early adopters of the labyrinth as a resource for well-being” (p. 8).

It is interesting to wonder, then, why is it that amongst the growing body of labyrinth literature worldwide, there is no equivalent book dedicated exclusively to their use within hospitals and other health care settings.

The book is based on contributions from over 20 authors, several of whom are international labyrinth experts. Part 1, First Steps, offers a range of advice and reflections from contributors who have introduced labyrinths to their own higher education settings. A key element of this section is the helpful guidance about how to create a labyrinth and the kinds of materials and space required. Part 1, and all subsequent sections, opens with a poem, giving evidence of the creativity that can be inspired by the labyrinth experience. In Part 2, Teaching and Learning Perspectives, labyrinth research expert John W. Rhodes provides an overview of labyrinth research and offers advice to practitioners embarking on research in this field. This is followed by a series of snapshots into research projects in a range of contexts, from labyrinth walking as a tool for reflective practice for health care students, to an exploration of mindfulness in the context of medicine and theology. In Part 3, Campus and Community, a range of contributors relate their own experience of labyrinth use, including examples in chaplaincy and counselling practice. The final section, Moving Forward (Part 4), provides a focus on useful sources and resources followed by the conclusion that celebrates “the gift that the labyrinth has to offer in these turbulent times” (p. 11).

For chaplains engaged in teaching and learning this book has much to offer, whether through the examples of using labyrinth walking as an aid to reflective practice or through the short chapter about using the labyrinth to help students process issues around grief and loss. It is inspiring to read about the creative and innovative ways in which labyrinths are being used as a tool for learning. Could health care chaplains use the labyrinth to bring creativity and innovation to their areas of responsibility?

My own experience as a chaplain working in mental health convinces me that the labyrinth has something to offer both staff and people using services. It is encouraging to see one of the contributors’ disclosure that the labyrinth helps her find balance when she is depressed, however other than this there is little specific reference to mental health. It would be interesting to see whether universities are using labyrinths to support the growing numbers of students struggling with mental health problems.

In a short section on labyrinths in hospitals, the focus is on their use as a learning resource for staff, but not without first acknowledging that

hospitals, hospices and palliative care settings are increasingly installing labyrinths for patient care (p. 116). According to the World Wide Labyrinth Locator (quoted on p. 72) there are 175 labyrinths in hospitals and other healthcare facilities worldwide, compared to 129 in college and university campuses. This excellent book will no doubt play its part in increasing that number over the coming years.

It is a delight to come across a tool – or opportunity – or gift that we can share with confidence as a chaplain. This has been my experience with the labyrinth and I hope that this book, which in itself is a valuable tool, will encourage other chaplains to embark on this journey. As I prepare our next indoor seasonal labyrinth at The Retreat I will hold the words quoted in this book close to my heart: “The labyrinth is a powerful tool for centering, focus and personal transformation for healers and their patients” (V. Sierpina, quoted in Kermeen & Kermeen 2012: 42).

## References

- Holloway, M., and B. Moss (2010) *Spirituality and Social Work (Reshaping Social Work)*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-230-36519-3>
- Kermeen, D., and M. Kermeen (2012) *Miracles Along the Path: Labyrinths in Stone*. Yorkville, IL: Labyrinths in Stone (information at [labyrinthsinstone.com](http://labyrinthsinstone.com) accessed 26 August 2015).
- Sewell, R., and J. Sellers (2012) *Working with the Labyrinth: Paths for Exploration*. Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications.