Book Review

Sellers, J. and Moss, B. (eds) (2016) *Learning with the Labyrinth*

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How can I enable my students to become more reflective, creative, mindful? This book discusses how the labyrinth can be used as a "gentle but powerful tool" (p.219) to foster these and other attributes in the context of HE. The editors are quick to dispel any misunderstanding about the difference between a labyrinth and a maze:

> "Unlike a maze, a labyrinth commonly has just one path to the centre, and you can always see where you are as the 'walls' are low or non-existent."
> (p.1)

Walking the labyrinth offers:

> "the opportunity for fresh insights, for time within – in touch with our inner selves – and for renewal"
> (p.1)

The book's 28 chapters are written by a wide diversity of international authors, including academics, students, artists, poets and photographers, who show how this "time within" might be used to foster learning in a variety of HE and community environments. The labyrinth is used as a metaphor for a journey – through a module, a degree course, indeed through life. Some of the authors extend the labyrinth metaphor to encompass the "Hero" (the labyrinth walker), the "Minotaur" (an issue they intend to address within the labyrinth) and the Quest.

The book is structured around four parts, each starting with a labyrinth-inspired poem. Part one, "First Steps", offers advice and reflections from practitioners on how to get started with using labyrinths in a professional context. The largest section, part two, focuses on "Teaching and Learning Perspectives" and provides an overview of labyrinth research, followed by a wide range of examples of how labyrinths are used in practice. In part three, "Campus and Community", other uses of labyrinths are explored, for example led by the chaplaincy, involving local communities, or taking a whole institutional approach. The final and brief part four, "Moving Forward," offers an opportunity to "equip ourselves for the journey" (p.11), outlining resources including labyrinth templates. Marshalling 29 contributors to produce a coherent text may have been a daunting journey, and the editors suggest that the four parts are not "watertight" (p.151). Nevertheless, the editors' notes throughout help to cross reference and integrate the book.

Each author is introduced at the beginning of their chapter, and many of the authors start by elaborating their own transformational labyrinth experience. Some chapters are detailed keynotes, while others are briefer case studies to illustrate various applications of the labyrinth. Given the diversity of authors, it could be argued that the quality of the writing is variable; nevertheless, each chapter contains valuable ideas and inspiration, and the range of styles contributes to an engaging and memorable cover-to-cover read. This book would also be suited to "dippers", since each chapter is a complete narrative (or journey) in its own right.

Indeed, the writing style is particularly suited to practitioners seeking hands-on guidance. While some research into the use of labyrinths in HE is elaborated, it is suggested that there is a dearth of research at present. Instead, the primary focus is on practical examples of how to set up and use a labyrinth. Rather than arguing for one uniform approach, the contributions by multiple authors provide the reader with the opportunity to plan their own "journey". Such an approach is consistent with the philosophy of this book, which highlights the individual nature of the labyrinth experience.

The labyrinth lends itself to visual representation, and the book includes many photos of labyrinths as well as accounts of how they have been used to inspire art and creativity. Of particular value to the practitioner are the photocopiable resources, comprising illustrated instructions on how to draw a labyrinth (chapter 3), and labyrinth images (chapter 27).

The accounts of how to initiate and promote the use of labyrinths include examples to suit all budgets. This is illustrated in microcosm by two early chapters. Writtle College features in chapter 2, whose authors outline innovative approaches used by staff working with an Artist in Residence to develop labyrinth events. While this chapter may leave some readers feeling that such approaches are beyond their resources, the subsequent chapter provides immediate relief. A fascinating range of materials to develop cheap and free labyrinths are illustrated, including masking tape (indoor) and fertiliser (on a lawn), with abundant practical advice.

Many inspirational stories are included in this volume, such as the use of a labyrinth as part of an after-dinner speech (chapter 7); within a conference (chapter 12); to generate poetry (chapter 16), dance (chapter 24) and self-healing (chapter 14); in a Quest of the Mystics course (chapter 20) and as a whole-institution initiative to promote student success and retention (chapter 22).

Overall, I would recommend this book, even to sceptics. You may think labyrinths are not relevant to your practice, but the enthusiasm of the writers is infectious. While Moss's parting shot might seem aspirational, you may find yourself tempted to try using one, in order:

> "to infuse and enthuse our shared teaching and learning, so that what we seek to offer our students is ultimately life-enhancing"
> (p.219).