

Title: **At the Heart of the Labyrinth: reflecting on our values**

Presenters: **Jan Sellers**
University of Kent

Abstract:

Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will:

- Have an awareness of shared core values, both personal and professional, and have considered how to sustain these values;
- Have experienced quiet reflective time as a core aspect of the workshop;
- Be able to distinguish between labyrinths and mazes;
- Be aware of the universality of the labyrinth: across faiths, cultures and nations, including some contemporary developments;
- Understand experientially the potential use of labyrinths as a resource to support reflection;
- Be aware of examples of contemporary labyrinth use in HE;
- Be able to locate further resources, and labyrinths, worldwide

Session Outline

Key issues to be addressed are:

In the face of stress, pressure and lack of time, this session provides time out to reflect on our own values. What truly matters to us? What values are at the heart of our lives, personally and professionally? What support do we need to sustain and deepen our own values, in an ever-changing work environment? This workshop offers a quiet time and space to consider personal and professional values, drawing on the shared understanding of participants, whilst at the same time forming an introduction to the labyrinth as a resource for Higher Education.

Unlike a maze, the labyrinth comprises a single, convoluted path to the centre and out again. The labyrinth is a powerful metaphor for travelling, for journeys through work and through life. As an image it is at least 3,500 years old, appearing in many parts of the world in many contexts (Saward, 2003). Research in the 1990s led to exploration of the labyrinth as a contemporary resource (Artress, 2006), offering interesting possibilities for HE in terms of staff and student development. People walk labyrinths for many reasons – enjoyment, relaxation, contemplation. At the University of Kent, building on a National Teaching Fellowship project (Sellers, 2008), we have begun to use the labyrinth to support teaching and learning.

During this workshop, a beautifully painted labyrinth, spread out on the floor like a carpet, will be available for participants to walk as a reflective journey. Building on initial discussion of shared and individual values, the labyrinth walk will form the main component of this workshop. This session offers a structured opportunity for reflection: an opportunity to step back and consider the values underpinning our lives and our work.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

- Introduction (short talk) 5 minutes
- Discussion of values (paired and shared discussion) 15 minutes
- Walking the labyrinth (individual activity) up to 60 minutes
- Closing reflections (shared contributions including evaluative feedback) 10 minutes

Accessibility: Please bring a clean pair of socks for walking! (I will provide spares, and shoe covers for orthopaedic shoes). Hand-propelled wheelchairs may be used on the labyrinth but permission will be requested to wipe wheels, as the labyrinth must be kept clean and dry. Due to the nature of the fabric, it is not feasible for users of electric wheelchairs to travel on the surface of the labyrinth, but other means of participation will be provided. This will include a table-top 'finger labyrinth', which is also useful for blind and partially sighted colleagues and others who would like to experience the design through touch, before walking. For queries about any aspect of participation, please contact Jan Sellers, J.G.Sellers@kent.ac.uk

References

Artress, Lauren. 2006. *Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the labyrinth as a spiritual practice*. [2nd ed.] New York: Riverhead.

Saward, Jeff. 2003. *Labyrinths and Mazes: The definitive guide to ancient and modern traditions*. London: Gaia.

Sellers, Jan. 2008. *Time and Space for Reflection: Bringing a labyrinth to the University of Kent*. Poster at: Learning Development in Higher Education Network, 5th Symposium, University of Bradford, March 17-18.