

The following is an excerpt from *Zen and the Mindful Classroom: The Stress Reduction Program for Students and Educators*, by Kimberly Post Rowe, 2006. Call 207-650-3964 or visit <http://www.mbtherapy.org> or <http://www.fiveseeds.org> for more information.

Labyrinths

A labyrinth is a winding pathway leading to a center. Labyrinths are found in many cultures and in many different forms, dating at least as far back as 3500 BC. Unlike a maze—which is multicursal, having many paths, choices, and dead ends—the labyrinth is unicursal, having a single path leading to the center with no loops, forks, or choices.

Walking or “finger walking” a labyrinth is considered to be a therapeutic tool and an ideal exercise in mindfulness. It is a synergistic activity, encouraging left-brain analytical and logical thinking, and right-brain intuition and creativity.

Time In

When we find our children in need of the traditional “time out”, try using a labyrinth for a self-soothing “time in.” Have the child verbalize their feelings (frustration, hurt, anger), then begin their “walk.” This journey to the center (a metaphor for becoming self-aware and mindful) is very calming. Upon reaching the center (the “goal”), have the child choose a positive feeling that will help them to achieve what they want. Once they have chosen their new “way,” they can follow it out from their center and begin this new way in the classroom.

From The Labyrinth Society’s (<http://www.labyrinthociety.org>) “Labyrinths in Schools” group:

Children laugh and giggle when they see a labyrinth. If handed a finger labyrinth, they need no instructions: a right- or left-hand “pointer” finger immediately goes to the mouth of the labyrinth and the tracing of the pattern begins. Some children like to run labyrinths, others walk them with quiet acceptance. But are children quieter after walking a labyrinth or more focused or easier to get along with? Quite frankly we think so, but so far we only have anecdotal evidence. We are just beginning to discover and study the effects of labyrinths on children.

In November of 2002, the executive committee of The Labyrinth Society accepted a proposal to set up email communication among TLS members who are interested in taking the labyrinth experience to school children. This group has gotten very active and there are now more than 50 members who are sharing experiences, information about activities, and ideas about using the labyrinth in school settings.

Information has come from members working with pre-school through high school students. School labyrinths have been painted or created from stones and themes have included peace, conflict resolution and a commemoration of September 11.

The following labyrinth is a scale replica of an ancient labyrinth constructed around 1200 AD in the stone floor of Chartres Cathedral, France. It is the best known eleven circuit labyrinth still in existence. It is approximately forty feet across, made of gray stone separated by blue-black strips of marble denoting the eleven concentric circles that wind around toward the six-petal center.

Laminate your labyrinth for “finger walking,” or make copies for more artistic explorations. It can be colored any way the child wants, but the traditional rainbow pathway is thought to help one move through and resolve emotional states. (Dr. Betty Ciuchta, <http://www.ispiritual.com>)