

Learn Some, Teach Some

by Jude Hobbs

Imagine you have just completed an inspiring Permaculture Design Course and you are wondering, what do I do next? How do I share this knowledge? What and where are there advanced trainings?

A recommendation I'll put forth is to find the subject that most intrigues you and zero in on that topic. As an example I have been involved with workshops on water catchments, hedgerows, and teacher trainings. One area of focus is co-facilitating Teacher Trainings with Tom Ward. We took on this advanced course after the requests of students wanting to understand more of the nitty gritty aspects of how to pass on the strategies and techniques of Pc (Permaculture), through teaching. In 1990, I was fortunate enough to attend the Advanced Course in Teacher Training offered by Australians, Lea Harrison and Max Lindeggar, in Dexter Oregon. Via the review of notes from that course, the stage was set.

Here is an attempt to unravel a bit of the magic of teaching a PDC (Permaculture Design Course) and share with you some of the lessons we learned from teaching teacher-training courses. Our TT's (Teacher Training's) are not just how to teach a PDC but a guide of how to personally evolve to teaching a PDC. Once you are feeling somewhat confident begin with an hour Introduction to Permaculture talk, then move on to a several hour class, week-end workshops and finally a full certification course, co-taught with experienced instructor(s). This is a classic example of a Pc principle applied: start small and intensive.

Sharing what you have learned with others is one of the main motivations to attend a TT. It is a way to dig deeper into the realms of Pc. Subject module building is just one aspect in the Art of Teaching. Then there is the reality that you need to organize, facilitate, present and generally learn the ins and outs of PDC's.

When asking a group of participants, in a Teacher Training course, "what are the characteristics that best describes your favorite teacher" the answers are always along a similar theme.

A sense of humor was the number one response we received along with being a good storyteller and having an engaging presentation style. Also, being knowledgeable in the subject, good facilitation skills, and being respectful is important. These are qualities to recognize and empower in new teachers.

With these basics, what does it really take to become a teacher? Let alone someone that participants want to come and learn with? And then how do we bring the true essence of a Permaculture Design Course to this process?

For starters, setting the tone in any teaching environment brings the clarity of intent an instructor wishes to offer to the class, workshop or course.

Our role as instructors is to provide a safe comfortable environment where all questions are honored and individuals' and the group's minds are challenged. We also want to support inter-relationships, community networking, worknetting and personal empowerment through confidence building. As instructors of a TT or PDC the hope is to guide and inspire through clear concise modules of each subject.

One opportunity in the teaching of Permaculture is that the diversity of participants is mind-boggling. People come with many resources and skills and attend for different reasons but the common desire is to learn and share about whole systems design. Before any course we ask participants to fill out a questionnaire so that we, as instructors, can have an understanding of who they are and how we can be of most assistance in their learning process.

So, who is your audience? In Pc courses, ages often range from 18 to 70. In the younger crowd (20-30) I've observed the inclination toward group dynamics, breakout exercises (defined as a small group centered around interactive discussions or activities on a specific topic with results presented to entire class), inter-personal connections and the need to be more physically engaged. They tend to want even more hands-on, as an energy release. The 30 and older crowd are very focused and want lots of specific information. Everyone enjoys the intergenerational aspect of our courses and the opportunities that provides.

Depending where in the world you are teaching the cultural differences need to be considered. There are language barriers, priorities of information to be learned, and the environmental and socioeconomic situations of that place. If you are involved in teaching in a region you are unfamiliar with, function as a guide and have the majority of the class taught by someone of that bioregion. When adults are taught from educators drawn from their own ethnic communities they tend to feel more comfortable and learn more. Be sure to fit the teaching to the culture. No matter where I teach, guests from the area are invited to share their knowledge and resources.

We receive continuous inspiration from participant evaluations of PDC's. The recurring feedback we hear is that our "courses are not taught in the traditional classroom fashion." Their experience is one of a relaxed, (though at times intense), fun, interactive learning setting that evolves from mixed modules and presentation styles. This is achieved through lecture, discussions, breakout groups, dynamic exercises, field trips, walk-about, hands-on projects, slides and other audio visuals, assignments, and participants presentations.

We are evolving a style of instruction that harkens from philosophies past. Carl Rodgers, a well know Swiss psychologist, focused on client-centered therapy. He realized that the learner centered approach invites knowledge seekers to take full responsibility for their decisions, actions and consequences. As an instructor my focus is for participants to be pro-active learners. This is encouraged through the process of critical and/or-dynamic teaching (see resources below). Another way of describing this is the Socratic means of teaching: simply stated, pose a framing question then brainstorm answers.... instead of standing in front of a class downloading massive amounts of information. By compiling these written brainstorms and placing them on a wall a group memory evolves for continued review and discussion.

Another teaching style difference noted by participants is that early on in courses we often do learning styles assessments to establish who are the auditory, visual and kinesthetic learners. Hands down, 90% of the people who attend PDC's (and TT's) are kinesthetic learning, which means they learn best by doing. Incorporating interactive exercises and hands-on projects are an integral part of teaching Pc.

There are abundant inspiring teaching resources available. One I find particularly applicable is Nail Postman and Charles Weingartner's book, Teaching as a Subversive Activity. This is a book that offers a 'no-holds-barred assault on out dated teaching methods-- with dramatic and practical proposals on how education can be made relevant to today's world."(Delta Book 1969).

There are many similarities in the way I teach a PDC and a TT. The one big difference is that in a TT, transparency is a key approach that we facilitate throughout the course. This offers participants an inside look and understanding why we choose to do what we do. In TT we are demonstrating the level of preparation that we recommend to have smooth running course and one that engenders passion.

Another aspect to be addressed in TT's is that potential teachers need to know exactly what is covered in a standard 72-hour certification Pc design course. The information taught in a PDC curriculum are the strategies presented in the PC Designer's Manual by Bill Mollison. We also work from Andrew Jeeves and Bill Mollison's Permaculture Handbook. We top it all off with a focus on bioregional perspectives.

In developing a course curriculum and sequence we note what the participants need to know, ought to know, and find helpful to know. We then offer resources to find out more about any given topic. As facilitator/instructors we bring at least four criteria to the teaching setting: ethics, knowledge, skills and our unique selves. As a generalist we are really not expected to know absolutely everything on every topic. This is when we determine with whom we wish co-teach. I have had the extraordinary opportunity to teach with many wonderful instructors. Working with others can be a tricky, but if you all come to the teaching experience with common ethics, integrity, communication styles and intent, the potential for a successful course is maximized. I have also always found gender balance to be an important aspect of a teaching team. It is truly amazing how information put forth can be heard very differently depending on whom and how it is presented. (I have used the term 'we' and 'I' throughout these writings putting forth ideas that 'we' or 'I' have incorporated throughout the many years of teaching.)

In teaching PDC's and TT's we follow the pattern of starting with ethics and philosophy and unfolding the Pc Principles. As we go through the design process we utilize, as a guide, a spiral teaching technique where we always loop back (spiral back) to information previously presented. We encourage extensive documentation to support the review of information as well encouraging participants to share what they have learned with others.

To me, teaching is all about empowerment. There are simple techniques on how to achieve this. For example saying participants not the term students. My goal is to eliminate the them and us feeling of the teacher being the 'all knowing'. Sharing meals and being available to engage in conversations and answer questions also creates a sense of equality. In the Tao Te Ching, Lao Tzu says, " Of the best leader, when the job is done the people say 'we did it ourselves.'"

This approach also assists in confidence building which is one of the most important aspects of people being comfortable teaching. We gain self-assurance through being organized, prepared, and having the opportunity to practice, practice, practice. The best way to gain practice is with family

and friends, community organizations, teaching at Elementary and High Schools Community Colleges, Universities and co-teaching PDC's.

Communication is the key: listen, participate, experiment, acknowledge, support, and most of all Enjoy.

If you do not have the opportunity to take a Teacher Training Course here are some resources that have been helpful for my teaching experience.

The Art of Teaching Adults: How to become an exceptional instructor & facilitator By Peter Renner Training Assoc Ltd; (1993) *The Instructor's Survival Kit: A Handbook for Teacher's of Adults* Peter Renner Vancouver, B.C. Training Associates 1983 *Permaculture Teachers' Guide* edited: Andrew Goldring *Earth User's Guide To Permaculture: Teacher's Notes* Rosemary Morrow *Mapping Inner Space: Learning and Teaching Visual Mapping* by Nancy Margulies, *Designing Group work*, Elizabeth G. Cohen, Harold Gardner's work on Multiple Intelligences *Dynamic Cultures Dynamic Teaching* by Robyn Francis *Permaculture International Journal: #74 The Manual for Teaching Permaculture Creatively* Robin Clayfield