
***Permaculture Teacher Training:
Evolving and Enlivening the Education Paradigm***

Jude Hobbs 2026

This article comes from the perspective of my guiding the process through which aspiring Permaculture educators gain the confidence and competence to share Permaculture strategies, principles and processes to a wide variety of audiences in a variety of educational settings: from 2-hour “Introduction to Permaculture” talks at local libraries to full 72+-hour standardized Permaculture Design Courses.

Since 2001 I have taught the Permaculture Teacher Training over fifty times and not taught it the same way twice. I am continually adjusting my teaching approach to incorporate individual needs, participant feedback and new pedagogical techniques. To me, this is the art of teaching: always growing and changing what I teach and how I offer a course by exploring varied teaching strategies with a primary focus on the active learner via a transformational learning process.

This article offers some ideas on how to effectively share information and empower individuals to discover their own teaching styles, along with some of my personal philosophy about evolving and enlivening the educational experience.

Safety first!

How many of you have felt safe in a classroom setting? Did you trust your teacher —their abilities to guide you with accurate information presented in ways you understood, in ways you found both accessible and inspiring? Did you trust your teacher to not roll their eyes if you gave the wrong answer to a question? Have you experienced an instructor being ethically inappropriate with you or with others? Unfortunately, these scenarios are very common in some educational situations. Cultivating a learning community by setting the tone of a safe environment for the “peer culture” of a classroom is imperative since many students are as afraid of being embarrassed in front of or by fellow students as well as in front of or by the teacher.

Co-create a safe learning environment by setting clear intentions.

1. Write about it. Compose a “Memorandum of Understanding” (MOU): A Community Guide.

The contents of the MOU came to be by lessons learned from offering this course in a wide variety of settings.

The morning after our evening course opening, which involves participant introductions, the class reviews a Memorandum of Understanding: A Community Guide, which was mailed to everyone pre-course. The MOU provides a common set of intentions on how we plan to interact as a learning community working collectively to support one another.

A. The group entertains a salon atmosphere. “Salon” is the art of considerate conversation. What one says should have something to do with what has been said before. Everyone is a facilitator.

We are all responsible to be aware of others who are not getting to speak or are saying too much. We know salon is working when there are pauses between speakers.

B. That personal boundaries be respected by all in attendance. We have a zero-tolerance policy for any racist, sexist, discriminatory and/or aggressive behaviors. If you experience any such behavior, please talk immediately with Jude or Carol. We will discuss any concerns with all parties involved.

C. That participants who experience interpersonal conflict address their concerns, first, directly to the other person(s) involved, face-to-face. If you are uncomfortable communicating directly, please speak with Jude or Emily who will assist in the mediation process.

D. That no one leave the course without communicating with someone. An unexplained absence is challenging to all. We will facilitate a buddy system so that no one is forgotten or feels isolated.

E. That all contributions, such as module presentations and questions, be short and to the point. Crisp, Clear, Concise and Ever-So Precise.

F. Practice self-facilitation during presentations: we welcome questions, for clarification. If you have stories to add or material that you think is being missed, take a moment to write a note to yourself and wait until the end of the presentation for open comments.

G. As this is a teacher training, we encourage you to be open to respectfully given constructive comments and critiques throughout this course. During the initial interview, I'll ask if you are sensitive to constructive feedback and, if so, how you wish to receive feedback during the course and, also, how you plan to work with groups as a presenter and as a team member.

H. We trust that all will be understanding to the limited time we have together, and that you will be on time to all sessions. If you are experiencing challenges, we ask that you talk with one of us.

I. Refrain from being under the influence of mind-altering substances during course time.

J. Full payment is due on the arrival day of the course, unless otherwise discussed with venue or instructors. If not honored, you will be asked to leave on the second day.

K. In order to receive a PINA PcTT course completion certificate you must: a.) attend all classes, b.) participate in the final presentations on the last day of the course, c.) have a Permaculture Course Design certificate. In order to offer Permaculture Design Course certificates, it is highly recommended that you co-lead & teach four PDC's with experienced Pc instructors prior to being a lead.

We encourage teaching Introduction to Permaculture workshops in libraries, to community groups and a variety of venues.

So we can make the best use of class time, and ensure the greatest learning experience possible for everyone, we ask you to agree to the above considerations. We will address any concerns regarding this agreement during the first day. Our goal is to pay attention to process: we are a learning community.

2. Talk about it.

We review the MOU as a group with the opportunity to discuss any questions and /or concerns and/or needed additions. During our course introduction we *set the tone* for people to be comfortable, stating that all questions are honored, inviting people to place anonymous suggestions in a specially

designated basket, and employing a variety of techniques to help participants get to know one another.

3. Additional ways to set the tone and build trust:

- ◇ Give participants an opportunity to share who they are and what their hopes are for the course. As part of the Course Teaching Packet I send a Questionnaire for participants to fill out before they arrive. Information requested through the Questionnaire includes prior Permaculture experience; a short biographical statement; a statement of their primary and secondary learning objectives and expectations for the course; explain any allergies, injuries, personal challenges that may affect their participation in the course; and an opportunity for participants to include anything else they would like to share about themselves or their concerns prior to the course.
- ◇ Arrange one-on-one interviews with participants upon arrival at the course.
- ◇ Be as transparent as possible. I like to give participants a sense of who I am as a person and an educator, why I offer information as I do, and what I have learned as an educator over many years, including many time-honored ‘tips of the trade.’
- ◇ Nurture positive relationships.
- ◇ Do not embarrass anyone. Keep a neutral and respectful manner in relation to gender, race, age, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.
- ◇ Utilize a Sense of Place: explore the many ways topography, geology, wildlife, water, native plants, food, shelter and housing can benefit the learning process.

***“Jude creates a course that finds the perfect balance
between creating a safe comfortable learning environment
and a place to push your comfort zone and to grow.”***

—J.D., Course participant, 2017

Co-create *Effective Learning & Learning-to-Teach Environments.*

1. Learning environments are considered “effective” if learner outcomes, individual and collective, are achieved for each module.

As an example, in teaching about roof water catchment, will the learner be skilled in sharing the steps in order for participants to design and install this type of whole system? In working together as a class can they achieve this goal in hands-on practice?

2. **Explore multiple pathways for-co-creating effective learning environments:**

- ◇ Participants and educator co-collaborate on a whole systems methodology to inform the learning process and co-create the learning environment. There is always something occurring within and among the parts of a system which maintains and enriches the whole over time. For the learning process and learning environment, it can be a daily pattern and/or being mindful of how big picture strategies involve the

dynamic integration of multiple elements and points of view. This can be accomplished by designing modules from patterns to detail.

- ◇ Keep everyone comfortable and energized! Provide a comfortable and functional classroom: seating, lighting, temperature, tables/desks, easy-to-read white/chalk boards and suitably colored markers/chalks, digital projector set up for ease of use, and plenty of wall space for poster galleries, etc. The classroom ought to be large enough for participants to sit in a circle, which enhances collaborative interactive learning. Encourage “break out dance parties” at breaks to keep the energy moving.
- ◇ Create Learning Poster Galleries for group memory.
- ◇ Maintain consistent patterns throughout the course so participants know what to expect. Provide a clear course outline and daily schedule of what is happening and when. Repeat regular classroom patterns throughout the course, such as daily morning check-ins, logistic check-ins and announcements.
- ◇ Teach the art of Mindful Facilitation (with role playing) early on in the course. This goes a long way in promoting self-facilitation among participants for the rest of the course.
- ◇ Time management: be aware of unrealistic expectations of how much you can achieve within an allotted time. Do less in more time.
- ◇ Empower participants through active learning, deep listening and pauses between when people speak. This is especially helpful for people who are quiet or may need to get up their nerve to speak.
- ◇ Encourage journaling: ask critical thinking questions to enhance learner generated outcomes. Journaling encourages self-reflection and deeper thinking.
- ◇ Asset mapping: encourage participants to identify and articulate their own and others’ strengths and weaknesses.
- ◇ Have participants prepare for and co-teach multiple short presentations. This enables participants to learn effective teaching strategies that build confidence via practice and peer coaching. Peer coaching addresses presentation style, including eye contact, voice projection and intonation, body language and remembering to breathe. These teaching exercises are designed to help participants practice and explore diverse teaching techniques, with a greater focus on becoming comfortable with these techniques and managing nervousness.
- ◇ “Stack functions” and build redundancy into the learning process: My approach is to present one subject in at least three of four different ways:
 - a. Power points
 - b. Posters
 - c. Interactive activities—experiential learning
 - d. Discussion groups
 - e. Hands-on projects
- ◇ Encourage “spiral learning” —returning back to a previously talked about topic. This repetition enhances memory, as it can take as many as six times for an adult to hear

a concept before it is retained. Apply information to local, bioregional and global perspectives.

- ◇ Design interactive activities, such as games, to address different learning styles and to enhance “edutainment.”
- ◇ Include hands-on program activities as much as possible. These can be outdoors types of activities with hands in the soil or working on building projects, or activities held within the confines of the classroom where small groups are given a task and challenged to come up with solutions, such as designing a sample interactive lesson plan that teaches how to build a compost pile.

Teaching From a Permaculture Perspective

Simply stated, teaching Permaculture wraps the above concepts to include the brilliance of sharing the ethics followed by the principles, on to strategies and then techniques. As Bill Mollison said of Permaculture: *It’s not about how to do it but how to think about doing it.*

In introductory courses, such as the Permaculture Design Course, we focus on the strategies studying whole systems, the big picture, not focusing on recipes. Follow-up workshops and courses are a vehicle for learning more about all the elements that are part of the systems.

***The magic in teaching
is the questioning mind (JH),
or as Socrates said,
“education is the kindling of a flame
not the filling of a vessel.”***

Finally, how can you tell this is working?

- ◇ Participants are actively engaged in shifting the conventional education paradigm of passive learning, often characterized as students as vessels to be filled with information they lack. Moving towards a collaborative, co-creative community-informed education paradigm inclusive of diverse learning styles and teaching modalities.
- ◇ Participants are animated, dialogue is lively and the atmosphere is inclusive.
- ◇ People are clearly enjoying themselves while remaining focused on the course: the mood is playful, creative and relaxed.
- ◇ Participants exhibit focused learning with a sense of deep satisfaction.
- ◇ Participants exhibit critical thinking with attention to problem solving.
- ◇ Instructional materials are relevant, timely, and applicable, empowering participants for future action.
- ◇ Participants exhibit application of Permaculture Principles and Ethics with the focus on relationship interconnections.
- ◇ As an educator you keep your ego in your pocket.

***“What Permaculturists are doing is the most important activity of any group in the world.”
—David Suzuki***

Why Guide Permaculturists, and Others, to Teach Permaculture??

Permaculture Education as an Extension of Permaculture Principles

My goal in guiding others to teach Permaculture is to encourage and inspire them to discover and celebrate their own unique strengths and abilities as educators. Also, to empower individuals with the confidence and tools they need to effectively communicate Permaculture principles, inspire change, and transform the way people everywhere value and apply true sustainability practices. As co-creators of the Permaculture Teacher Training learning environment, and through collaborative, dynamic interactions via group projects, participants build a strong social community forming resource networks to support one another and maintain lasting friendships.

I actively support the next generation of Permaculture trainers with the philosophy that sharing meaningful knowledge is regenerative, empowering and part of the Permaculture solution....“kindling (and strengthening) the flame” of Earth Care, People Care and Future Care.

Student Testimonials

“This course is a living example of Permaculture Design. The design of the course itself, the course location, the learning environment, and the total delivery embody the principles, ethics, and functional application of Permaculture Design for place, people, and evolution. This course has empowered me with the knowledge, strategy, tools, techniques and ability to empower others through teaching.” —C.S. (2016)

“This course is a week-long intensive for Permaculture designers and educators who are interested in honing their craft as teachers/presenters. It has been transformative and valuable beyond measure. Jude has a lot of wisdom and knowledge to share and is great at drawing out our strengths. She helped facilitate learning peer to peer and has helped me grow as a Permaculture designer and educator. Jude herself is an amazing resource, and the bulk of my learning came through her ability to tap into the wisdom of the group and inspire thoughtful reflection.” —T.M. (2018)

*I would absolutely recommend this course! Jude comes to the table with so much knowledge and experience, and then in turn is able to present it clearly. This class helped me to expand my awareness of the different avenues of teaching and learning. It was empowering and gave me many tools for confidence and clarity for spreading knowledge that will in turn empower others. I’m excited to take these tools out into the world and use them!
M.H. (2018)*

This course is a master class in the art of teaching Permaculture that educators in any environment will find value in. I have facilitated 3 courses and taught 3-4 modules, but was not ready to do it on my own. [During this course,] I found a voice I didn’t know I had. My poster game improved! I feel more capable and confident, but also humbled. This course gave me a renewed sense of purpose and desire for this work. R.C.(2018)

Jude Hobbs is an internationally recognized Permaculture educator and designer with 40 years' experience in the design and teaching fields. Her focus is whole systems thinking to generate environmentally sound solutions that inspire sustainable actions in urban and rural settings. As an educator, she conveys her passion for permaculture by providing curricula developed to encompass diverse learning styles with teaching techniques that are accessible, inspiring and information rich. Jude co-tends Wilson Creek Gardens, a 7-acre homestead and demonstration site located in Cottage Grove, Oregon, U.S.A.

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Listen to Jude's interview on **The Permaculture Podcast** describing this course:
<http://www.thepermaculturepodcast.com/2015/episode-1522-teachertraining/>