



THE PERMACULTURE MOVEMENT AND EDUCATION: SEARCHING FOR WAYS FORWARD

DECEMBER 1993

This extended discussion of issues surrounding permaculture education and more broadly the movement was written at a time when my own role in permaculture teaching and movement “politics” was expanding stimulated by the second wave of permaculture activism in Australia (roughly 1988-1993). It explains some of the social and educational context for the origin of permaculture as well as a more explicitly political analysis of permaculture as a radical change movement.

It critiques the spread of permaculture, and the Permaculture Design Course, while acknowledging its value and achievements. I suggested consolidation of the structures of diploma accreditation which Bill Mollison set up in the mid 1980's before venturing down the path of mainstream accreditation of permaculture education.

A decade later, the Permaculture Institute and Academy structures had failed to grow beyond the personal control of Bill Mollison and the diploma process was moribund. While commitment to the PDC in Australia has remained strong, national accreditation of Permaculture as a competency based “industry” training package owned and controlled by Permaculture International Ltd, the only body broadly representative of the Australian permaculture movement, has provided a new pathway for the development of permaculture education.



*See **Accredited Permaculture Training: A Critique** for my reasons for supporting the concept, my reservations about the initial package and some suggestions for its improvement. It is interesting to note that in 1993, the same year that **The Permaculture Movement and Education: Searching For Ways Forward** was written, Mollison handed control of permaculture education in Europe to the European Institute and that it has gradually developed the Mollison model into a genuine peer controlled process for assisting permaculturists in ongoing development and training.*

*Another interesting aspect of the 1993 article is the way it uses the systemic thinking of permaculture to understand the processes of the movement, an early articulation of ideas which were later to be consolidated in **Permaculture: Principles and Pathways Beyond Sustainability**.*



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I would like to address a number of issues concerning permaculture education, design and practice and how these relate to formal accreditation systems in the wider society. Both Lea Harrison and Robin Francis have addressed some of the problems and challenges facing the permaculture movement in dealing with aspects of these issues. Rather than directly responding to their proposals, I would like to expand on some of the ideas relevant to the future organizational structure of the movement which I only briefly touched on in *Development of the Permaculture Concept* (PIJ no. 44). Hopefully these ideas will also be of more general interest to people involved in permaculture at all levels.

In the process, as the co-originator of the permaculture concept, I will cover some of the story of my involvement with the permaculture movement, a subject which I am inclined to avoid, but that may help others clarify their own involvement and position on the issues which confront the movement.

There has been a lot of talk about permaculture as a discipline (as in 'academic'), a profession, trade, business and even as an industry. I have great difficulty with these constructions of permaculture for many reasons.

RADICAL ORIGINS

Permaculture arose from interaction between myself and Bill Mollison in the mid 1970's. We were two (very different) social radicals on the fringes of (different) education institutions at the global fringes of western industrial society in Tasmania.

Bill Mollison as bushman turned senior tutor, in the Psychology Dept. of the Tasmanian University, attracted large student audiences to hear his radical and original (pre-permaculture) ideas while outraging the academic establishment.

I was a student in the Environmental Design School, a revolutionary "experiment" in tertiary education at the Tasmanian College of Advanced Education. This design school ran for ten years under the inspired leadership of Barry McNeil, a Hobart architect and education theorist. Visiting and local professionals accounted for a substantial part of the staff budget. There was no fixed curriculum but a strong emphasis on decision making processes and problem solving. Self assessment, democratic organization and many other elements which radicals within tertiary institutions only dream about, were reality within the school.

Even within the intellectual freedom and stimulation of Environmental Design I was on the fringes, with my all consuming permaculture work and my student-mentor relationship with Bill Mollison. My work was largely ignored within E.D. although Barry McNeil has since acknowledged it was probably the most important concept to emerge from the school. I never went on to do the post graduate degree which would have led to a professional qualification (in Landscape Architecture) because of my disgust with the design professions, my strong desire to build my practical skills, and to practice what I preached.

For me, growing up in a family of radical political activists I found ecological principles reinforced the political notion that radical change is always a bottom up process. Marx suggested that happened by an uprising of the oppressed masses. But in modern industrial society, the environmental dilemma highlighted the material addictions of the comfortable masses as the seed of their [our] own destruction. The problem lay with ourselves rather than simply with exploiting multi-nationals, etc.

The old spiritual notion of changing the world by changing oneself was a powerful idea for this atheist. This means starting with the individual and the family or household within which we live. In the outward extending ripples of change it becomes easier for succeeding people to see the need for change from consuming resources, to conserving and creating permacultural abundance.

In addition, I do not believe it is necessary for a majority to undergo a radical change for a flip to occur in society. Chaos theory and especially the concept of punctuated equilibrium, confirmed by observation in all the natural sciences suggest gradual evolution is the exception rather than the rule. In society, long periods of stability dominated by tradition, law and institutional forms are punctuated by rapid and apparently chaotic change where individuals and small groups create new cultural forms¹. These cycles occur on large time scales throughout history. However they also repeat themselves within the lives of individuals, communities and organizations not as a series of closed loops but as open ended and intertwined spirals.

We can see many examples of the fragility and collapse of established systems and whole societies, with the Soviet Union being the most dramatic. Perhaps an even more pertinent example might be the faith that binds the financial value systems of global industrial society.

The whole global economic edifice which is rapidly consuming the planet and its people, is in fact a very fragile monster, dependant on the faith and complicity of relatively small populations of middle class people in affluent countries, and most particularly the continued faith of that parochial clan of McLuhan global village, the money and commodity market people. Ronald Reagan (as the most powerful man on earth) after the '87 stock market crash, said with unconscious truth, that the system would not collapse so long as people continued to have faith. Has there even been an emperor, king or president to admit to his people that they had the power to bring the whole system down? My point here is not to dwell too much on apocalyptic scenarios but to refute the concept that is necessary to get "every man and his dog" to change before society will change.

One of the problems of personal and societal change is that the old patterns die hard and as we reach for the solution we keep re-inventing the problem in a new form. This is quite natural and can be observed in nature where deeply embedded proven systems keep reasserting themselves (Nature is conservative).

1. Thompson, W.I. In Jnl. of the New Alchemy Institute Stephen Green Press

In the early promotion of permaculture the tools of mass media were effectively used to spread the word quickly and widely but the efficiency of these tools at producing effective change is very low. So often, fertile social ground was (and still is) plowed, seeds sowed, but only a few germinated; some producing a bitter harvest. Frequently, as enthusiasm wanes in one locality, city, region or country, new ground is plowed in a shifting cultivation. This may be a particularly dismal image (which is hardly the whole picture) but my point is that modern mass media can be very effectively used to stimulate people beyond the capacity of a movement to follow up with the painstaking local, personal efforts, needed to assist and facilitate productive action. We are in fact dealing with very dangerous tools in mass media which carry with them many of the inherent destructive characteristics of the defunct paradigms. Jerry Mander² has outlined the problems inherent in television. To some extent these problems even apply to books.

The use of mass media including books has been a major factor in the spread of the permaculture concept and although I would be the last to say these approaches should be totally rejected, they must be acknowledged as classic top down methods of change, the same tools used by governments and corporations to mould society. To believe these are value free tools which can be easily used for good or ill is very naive.

The Biodynamic movement began from very small beginnings in this country, largely under the leadership of Alex Podolinsky. It has been remarkably effective in changing land use on large areas of farm land and building the numbers of competent home food gardeners in this country. This was done initially by avoiding all mass media and working directly in small self-help groups. It was only with an established network of solid practitioners that Podolinsky finally agreed to let ABC Countrywide do the program on BD which produced more inquiries from farmers than any other issue.

The permaculture movement has a lot to learn in this regard. On the other hand the BD movement has some similarities with Permaculture, perhaps the most striking being the role of the charismatic genius of its leader. Elsewhere³ I have referred to Yeomans Podolinsky and Mollison as men with much in common in leading the fight against the agricultural establishment. The role of these men in bringing about change is a complex and a very pertinent subject to the future of the permaculture movement but is not something I wish to enlarge on here.

PERSONAL CREDIBILITY

Much of the focus for promotion of permaculture has been around the idea that we can grow much of our own food where we live and that this is one of the most powerful actions we can take in bringing about societal change. There is nothing wrong with this simple idea and large numbers of people have been influenced and assisted by permaculture in doing

2. Mander, J. *Four Arguments For The Elimination of Television* Quill 1977.

3. Holmgren, D. *Creating a History of the Search for Sustainable Landuse in Australia*, Article Thirteen 1993

this. Although in any sustainable society we can “design”, it is not necessary for everyone to grow their own fresh food, it is undisputed (in permaculture) that we need an explosion of competent food gardeners in this country. Why is it then that the majority of people who have recast their work and careers around permaculture do not grow food either as a living or even for themselves and their families to any significant degree? Largely because they are too busy organizing, designing and teaching and selling.

The way we earn our living is obviously a major part of practising permaculture and in the current economic climate few of us have the resources and skills necessary to make a living producing food in a sustainable manner. The realization of this fact should engender sympathy and respect for farmers. Instead we are just as likely to hear arrogant prejudice about farmers destroying the land from permaculturists as from other food consumers. I believe many permaculturists don't produce their own food because they have tried, found it difficult and not particularly exciting. This is especially true for the generations raised on the instant gratification of television and modern education.

When ‘Mrs Jones’ buys Thai tuna or Californian oranges just because they are cheap, I find it hard to be outraged if she is only claiming to be following short term financial self interest. However I am disappointed, to say the least, when those in the forefront of permaculture promotion privately suggest it's cheaper or easier to buy good quality food from the supermarket, ignoring the huge compromises which even organic growers make with sustainability principles to survive commercially. Proverbs about throwing stones and glass houses come to mind. My natural inclination is to turn my disappointment back on myself and consider the ethical contradictions in my own behaviour. Despite its bad reputation by association with the Chinese cultural revolution, I believe self criticism is essential, so long as it is balanced by affirmation and recognition of self worth.

PERMACULTURE IS NOT A PROFESSION

We can take a permaculture approach in any (reasonable) job or profession but to jump to the conclusion that permaculture **IS** a job, career or profession is false. There is nothing wrong with people using permaculture design as a short hand way of saying they are garden or farm designers who use permaculture principles in their work. But when people suggest we need to make permaculture a design profession which can sit alongside other design professions and so achieve credibility in the wider society they are making several mistakes:

1. the search for credibility by belonging to some group is illusory in today's society where we see the progressive breakdown of all forms of established credibility. New secure structures of credibility cannot be established in this social environment.

2. to effectively operate the organizational structures necessary to make a profession able to function at a national level requires financial and other resources which drains off limited activist and practitioner resources. This has been a recurring mistake in the permaculture movement where structures appropriate to large organizations are used in the hope that growth of the movement will generate the resources necessary to support these systems. Permaculture principles suggest we should network and organize at the smallest most local level for each particular function and only move to larger levels when the local ones are effective and generating surplus resources adequate to support these inherently more expensive but less essential systems.
3. permaculture is only one of thousands of groups from nurses through to sellers of travel packages seeking the hallowed status of being a profession. When the mob is running in one direction, quietly walk off in the opposite is my motto, which I learnt from my parents, clarified for me by Bill Mollison.
4. there is a problem of logic when we define permaculture as a separate design profession because it implies there is a particular set of skills or competencies distinct from other professionals. In fact as Bill Mollison said in *Grave Danger of Falling Food*, “permaculture always did lie between the disciplines.” It is a wholistic system which can integrate and recast the work of the existing design professions. If it is to become its own profession then it foregoes the valid concern with what all design professionals do. And as more and more sustainable approaches are taken up by trades and professions any separate permaculture profession would be left with a baggage of idiosyncratic ideas which didn't quite work.

A generalist permaculture designer may be a good person to advise on general aspects of house siting and design but an architect or a builder with a permaculture perspective is the person to help with the details. If someone is setting up a commercial orchard, a generalist permaculture designer such as myself may be able to help a little but what is really needed is a competent tree crop horticulturalist with a permaculture perspective. These people will continue to call themselves architects, builders and horticulturalists. They have the training, accreditation and industry networks which provide most of the benefits (and problems) which some people hope to set up for permaculture. We should use these systems, parasitically if necessary, working around the restrictions they may involve.

However, there is clearly an important role for the independent permaculture generalist to fill in the gaps in established systems, self taught and informally apprenticed, constantly

innovating and experimenting with their own systems and passing on the hard won lessons, gaining credibility by the results of their work.

This is a tough role, and a professional structure will not help those who are not up to it, to do anything more than paper over their inadequacies. This brings me to the issue of permaculture education.

PERMACULTURE EDUCATION

The “72hr” permaculture design course has been the basis of permaculture education since the first courses run by Bill Mollison at Stanley in the early 1980’s. From the very beginning I was critical of many of the assumptions behind the PDC. Despite, and maybe partly because of, those criticisms, the PDC has evolved into an effective method for extending the ideas which I believe the movement should focus on consolidating rather than venturing into the minefield of TAFE or any other accreditation. While acknowledging the positives it may be useful to outline my original criticisms.

For me, coming from the radical, process-based education of Environmental Design, the concept of a fixed curriculum of subject material which was based on the particular (admittedly very broad) knowledge of Bill Mollison was a mistake. It has led to permaculture teachers with little knowledge of keyline, for example, teaching a group of mostly ex-urban small property holders in the wrong climate zone about broadacre irrigation for pastoral farming.

The early courses by Bill Mollison appeared to rely on his encyclopedic knowledge, incredible story telling skills, and challenging charismatic ability to hold the attention of a group of students through a series of lectures with few educational aids or relief. Other teachers attempted to do the same with less than satisfactory results. Some consider that I have an encyclopedic grasp of technical issues and “gift of the gab”, but I still will not teach more than 50% of a course, and I make extensive use of slides, charts, provided notes and other materials. I also tend to work with teachers who use more interactive and participatory teaching methods than I do.

The third and greatest problem with the original PDC’s was the explicit notion that the two week intensive residential course was a training program for design consultants who would operate as anarchistic generalists in the way I mentioned before. I and many others found this a ridiculous proposition and said so (diplomatically) at the first convergence in 1984. To my (and other’s) amazement Bill Mollison immediately outlined a structure of two years practical work following the certificate which was necessary to complete, with documentation submitted to the Institute for approval, to obtain the diploma and become a graduate member of the Institute. Further he suggested that work could be in one or more areas including architecture, site development, media etc. This passed into history as a decision of the convergence⁴ and represented a substantial improvement in the situation.

4. Permaculture Institute News in *Permaculture Journal* no. 19, Feb. '85.

I was issued with an honorary diploma which I graciously accepted but continued to pursue my own path consulting and doing some teaching via lectures, seminars and workshops, many of them without the permaculture label.

In fact, the laissez faire system initiated by Mollison has not resulted in huge numbers of charlatans doing incompetent design for unsuspecting clients. Although many enthusiasts rushed off from PDC's to consult, most ethically selected themselves out because they recognised they didn't have the skills, or proceeded with an on-going self training process where they were notionally in business but really they were subsidizing their own training with very low charges, the dole or other income.

This accounts for the limited number of people earning any sort of a living as consultants who do not also have other design training and accreditation. When I set up Holmgren Design Services in 1983, I had already been going through this process myself (unconsciously) virtually since 1976. I have never had an income (since College) which was not permaculture related but 92/93 was the first year that I have paid tax. The constraints of practicing what you preach, on-going self training and research and the limits of the market place didn't allow the generation of incomes much above the poverty line, which I find more than adequate to live on.

EXISTING INSTITUTE ACCREDITATION OF GRADUATES

The system for issuing of diplomas has never really worked in Australia for a number of reasons:

1. Failure of teachers to give to students consistent information about the requirement for "professional" use of permaculture, and a lack of commitment to the system.
2. Few apprenticeship opportunities for trainees.
3. Poor bioregional networking between teachers and virtually no opportunities for peer review or working together. Vries Gravestein's organization of a design exercise for participants at the 1990 convergence was the best effort I know of in this regard.
4. Perceived low value of the diploma in obtaining work compared with institutional qualifications.

RAPID GROWTH OF PERMACULTURE TEACHING

There was a rapid expansion of the movement and PDC's in the late 1980's on the back of the a new wave of environmental consciousness, the TV release of *In Grave Danger of Falling Food* and publication of *The Designers Manual*. (The publication of *Permaculture One* and *Two* coincided with a previous wave.)

In Victoria the numbers of PDC's remained low until 1992. Increasingly I was approached by teachers and others soliciting more active involvement. In 1991 I co-taught my first design course with Hugh Gravestine and Andrew Sheridan on the Far South Coast of NSW, in the following year a second with Colin Endean and Ric Allen in Adelaide, and a third with Lea Harrison at Kangaroo Valley in NSW. After this I felt in a position to design my own courses which built on the substantial experience gained in ten years of PDC's but incorporated some of my own material which I saw as central to permaculture as well as addressing the problems outlined above.

Elsewhere, especially overseas, experienced and knowledgeable teachers were also developing the course content and methods in quite divergent directions but perhaps without the intellectual confidence and freedom which I feel in dealing with the subject.

Over those ten years it was clear that two things had happened. Some of the inspired brilliance of Mollison's original teachings has become lost in translation and reduced to sets of prescriptions and fixed examples. On the other hand teachers had become more experienced in teaching methods and accessed more materials while people with established design, horticulture and other skills were becoming teachers. The laissez-faire system challenged serious permaculture teachers to work out their own explanations of permaculture rather than simply relying on Bill Mollison for all the answers.

The trouble with the improvements in PDC's is the knowledge and experience of course participants is improving even faster. One of the great strengths of the PDC has been the open entry requirements and the mix of persons from school leavers to practicing professionals, from farmers to grandmothers who come together for two weeks to learn from the teachers and each other.

The lack of follow-on structured learning situations for permaculture has led to some teachers developing advanced design courses which mostly appear to be either teacher or consultant training focused, or specialist courses (eg architecture, horticulture, village design etc) with very little advance in the depth of treatment of general principles, issues and methods.

It was suggested to me (by Ric Allen and others) that the material I was teaching was more appropriate to an advanced design course but I have decided against that move because it automatically restricts courses to people who have completed a PDC. Instead I have worked at improving my teaching methods to make the material more digestible. I have also aimed at getting more experienced practitioners in a range of fields into courses so they are in a position to immediately apply the permaculture framework to their own work, a far faster way of getting effective and competent action than advanced courses.

At the same time I don't want to set up courses for professionals which can so easily bypass the personal and domestic change at the heart of permaculture. A mix of people, including younger ones with little experience but the energy and enthusiasm of youth,

and older sometimes not highly educated people with experience, act as a foil and balance to the high powered professionals wrapped up in their work. In this way the PDC has the potential to span the spectrum of education from school to post graduate and experience from the kitchen sink to the back paddock.

Much of the value in the PDC comes from the generally residential format which gives the opportunity to design a course environment which will challenge and influence people's personal living and (most importantly) eating habits so central to permaculture. Cynics would describe it as "brain-washing" and certainly many course participants find the experience very personally challenging. If you put 20 fairly environmentally and socially aware, but very different adults together in a new and isolated environment they will generate some interesting interactions themselves. Consequently I have a strong commitment to the residential format, although I recognise the difficulties for many people in allocating two weeks to the course.

TEACHING INSTITUTION ADOPTION OF PERMACULTURE

In recent years permaculture has been increasingly incorporated in vocational training and other institutional education in a number of ways. Some institutions have provided venues, organization and sometimes funding for PDC's (generally non-residential). Permaculture teachers have developed units within existing (generally horticulture) courses and many teachers in institutions have incorporated elements of permaculture. At the post graduate tertiary level I have written material for an external studies Graduate Diploma in Sustainable Agriculture through Orange Agricultural College NSW.

These developments are substantial opportunities of the movement while at the same time threaten to emasculate the radical and independent nature of permaculture teaching. To some extent these developments are inevitable but they can be managed for better or worse.

Some explanation of the approach I took with Orange may help other permaculture teachers deal with these situations and even contribute to the movement making a co-ordinated approach to the prospect/problem.

In the Orange course I did not have to deal with "who would teach the material" because it was an external studies course. The college did agree that liaison with students and marking would be by a graduate of the Permaculture Institute, in this case myself. The course included a strong process and human change focus as well as contract learning assessment which allows students to design their own course to a fair degree.

The biggest conflict was having to accept permaculture being one of three modules within the Alternative Agriculture unit along with Organics and Biodynamics. In reluctantly accepting this, the introduction to the material included a critique of the course structure and underlying politics pointing out that permaculture was in fact a wholistic conceptual

framework within which sustainable agriculture could be constructed. I went on to point out this module was complementary to and more specialised than a PDC not a post graduate substitute for the PDC. I suggested organics and biodynamics could be thought of as sustainable production systems within a permaculture framework and made linkages to other units but also invited the students to use the permaculture perspective in analysing and critiquing the course as a whole. In this way I hoped to provide the more perceptive and radical students with the tools to challenge the assumptions behind the course (including permaculture).

I believe this approach of a radical unit within a course can be used as a test for whether the institutions are serious about wanting to include permaculture in their courses. It also can alert people that permaculture is much more than the particular field which they are studying. We need to remember that most people approach permaculture via a particular field of interest. For students of horticulture it is natural that they will initially see permaculture as a radical form of horticulture which over time can change into a conceptual framework through which they can organize and develop their horticultural vocation and their personal life.

Recently, Troy, a student on a six month TAFE horticultural training program, stayed at Hepburn Permaculture Gardens for work experience. He was a keen worker, diligent student and obviously an uncomfortable radical within a fairly conservative course with conservative students. At the end of the course the whole group did a tour of Hepburn Permaculture Gardens as an extra-curricular activity. I believe the work experience and tour opened the eyes of the students (and teacher) to what “mad” Troy was on about and allowed Troy a way to express his values and knowledge while battling it out in the system.

PDC AND MOVEMENT ACCREDITATION

I want to return to consideration of our own structures because following permaculture principles I think we need to get our own house in order before we can in any way deal with control of how permaculture is incorporated into mainstream education.

I have indicated that much has been achieved through the laissez-faire approach to permaculture education but there is a need to make some of the systems and structures we already have work better.

We need to improve the quality of the course to do justice to the quality and experience of course participants. On going training workshops in teaching methods are one way but these should be for people with demonstrable skill and knowledge with natural systems who need help in communicating their knowledge. As we draw more people into teaching permaculture who already have teaching skills, what is more important is more informal residential programs, work experience and apprenticeships under experienced practitioners so that teachers are talking about things they do understand. In this regard I believe the WWOOFing network has been one of the most successful ways at providing

people with more day-to-day experience of living and working in more sustainable ways. We need to look at how we might build on and support that network rather than replicating it.

We need better documentation of good working systems, a job which innovative practitioners frequently neither have the time nor skills to do. Trainee teachers could use their documentation skills (plans, photographs, notes etc) to record these projects during WWOOFing or other work experience visits to develop their own portfolios of teaching materials. Practitioners should always have the opportunity to vet materials and be provided with copies for their own use and retain copyright control over the use of their work.

Copying of notes, slides and other materials from teachers should only occur through an apprenticeship process where the trainee has a very good grasp of the subject.

Teachers should avoid taking offers to teach courses outside their bioregional experience unless there are very good complementary local resources and expertise involved. This may slow the expansion of the movement but will ensure that more of the sown seeds germinate. Teaching permaculture to a higher standard requires a rooted connection to local venues, resources and practitioners which makes globally mobile teaching an extremely difficult job which will never produce the quality of courses possible once a network of local expertise and resources is established.

Recently, my own criteria for agreeing to teach a course in Israel included that it would be in a similar bioregion (not arid where I have limited expertise), that I would be co-teaching with permaculture activists with some teaching experience, knowledge of my approach and long term commitment to the region, and time (weeks) to familiarize with the local situation, people and resources. I don't want to criticise the valuable pioneering work which many Australian teachers have done overseas and do not wish to address the complex issue of permaculture education as overseas aid. I am simply pointing out the criteria I have used as I venture into a new area of practice.

We do need a national body as a central register of graduates and some general guidelines like those set up following the '84 convergence. I would like to see the implication that the PDC is a training system for consultant designers or teachers completely removed. (I do not use the Institute certificates because they refer to "Permaculture Design Consultants Course"). I would also like to see the categories revised and preferably reduced in number.

I think it is essential that the details of any peer review and regulation of persons admitted as graduates (and therefore independent teachers) be done at the bioregional level. If there is not the networking and resources at this level then any attempt to do so at a national level is likely to fail. We should accept that different bioregional networks may apply the rules differently but that can reflect real differences in needs and capacities to regulate. (This already happens at an international level).

There has been much angst about the proliferation of courses, cut throat competition and poor standards. A severe analysis could liken permaculture education to a form of pyramid selling where the main economic outcome of courses is more courses. These issues have certainly troubled me but we need to keep several things in mind:

1. Natural systems undergoing rapid growth based on available energy tend to be characterised by a lot of competition, crude systems and poor development of symbiotic or networked structures. As available resources restrict growth, selection pressures result in a culling of poorer systems and models, while development of co-operation and networks increase. With permaculture courses at the moment it is very much a case of buyer beware and to a fair degree you get what you pay for.
2. On the issue of cost, I think we need to get away from the idea that courses should be run at rock bottom prices so everyone can have access to courses. My considerations on cost include:

Firstly, in our society, for better or worse, the vast majority of people do not value what they do not pay for. Improving the quality of courses is pointless if participants come along because someone else paid for it or the course represented a cheap holiday. Commercially driven residential courses in other fields comparable with our \$800 Hepburn Design course (limited to 20 people) would cost \$2000.

Cross subsidisation is a better way to provide access for lower income persons (we provide 4 places at \$600) while government or business funded participation is a two edged sword which should be handled carefully. For subsidised participants we vet people and require up front payment of deposits by the individual and would restrict numbers of funded participants.

I think that the private enterprise context of permaculture education has been one of its strengths and we should avoid the traps of the social welfare mentality that it is everybody's right to be able to do a PDC without sacrifices. Learning by doing, WWOOFing, subsidised introductory courses and institutional courses which will progressively include permaculture material are open to everyone, and increasingly training programs specifically set up for disadvantaged groups can include permaculture material.

3. I think it is important that experienced teachers do get some remuneration commensurate with the enormous effort in presenting a well organized and taught course. However, I think there are also substantial dangers in establishing a career structure for teachers which rewards teachers for just teaching. Having to do other things to stay sane, earn income, maintain humility, connection to the earth and continually learn are essential. "Professional teachers" who do not garden or in other ways face the enlightening and frustrating realities of living and working with nature are in grave danger of re-inventing all the problems we seek to overturn.

Barry McNeill said that no one should teach design in an institution for more than 7 years without going back to professional practice. In permaculture we need to be much stricter in our guidelines if we are to retain the integrated perspective which the wider society is constantly subverting with its rewards for specialisation, chopping our lives up into separate compartments.

PERMACULTURE ACADEMY

The announcement of the creation of a Permaculture Academy by Bill Mollison⁵ earlier this year has further complicated an already unclear situation regarding permaculture movement accreditation. Although many of the intentions behind the academy are commendable and in fact reflect some of the perspectives discussed above, I see grave problems with a new structure when the foundation on which it is based (the PDC and Institute accreditation of graduates) is so much in need of consolidation.

Unless students are already in close working contact with supervisors, it is very hard to assess the real practical value of any work and there will be the tendency to fall back into the academic mould totally dependent on documentation within a particular discipline. Surely we should be trying to achieve effective interdisciplinary assessment of the permaculture trainees for becoming graduates of the Institute before setting up higher level assessment processes requiring greater skill and commitment.

Clearly, the academy will not provide any resources to assist struggling practitioners and researchers. The main value which will accrue is an academic qualification which may provide some credibility within mainstream systems for worthy permaculture practitioners. However, we need to consider the status, or lack of, conferred by being a graduate of the Institute, before we escalate the stakes with investing effort into higher academic structures.

A mature sustainable community or society can easily deal with its most capable members having the responsibility and privilege to specialize but for us in the vortex of the paradigm

5. The Creation of a Permaculture Academy in *Permaculture International Journal* no. 47, June '93.

shifts, we need to work a lot harder at developing the wholistic, generalist base from which specialization is possible. After all we are talking about overcoming a four hundred year cultural heritage of increasing specialisation to the point of collective and individual schizophrenia. Study of natural and human systems teach us that the types of changes needed come about through a radical reintegration at the bottom within the life of each individual, not through some moderation of excesses back to some supposed balance.

RELATIVISM AND DOGMA

Through my constant reference to the need for a radical approach, it is essential that this not be interpreted as an adherence to a set of rigid principles which very quickly become dogma. To the degree to which permaculture might be seen as a “faith” it is a highly relativistic one, there being few if any absolutes. Everything is context dependent.

For example, some might say that use of herbicides is unacceptable in any situation and regard such rules as reflecting a radical approach. I see the one off use of a herbicide (depending on which one) for the establishment of direct seeded or planted trees in their thousands essential to the stabilisation of broad acre cropping and pastoral lands and is very different from annual spraying of roadsides by councils or annual spraying under orchard trees. Energy analysis and other forms of accounting suggest a great difference between these two.

Where we are uncertain about when and how to compromise on a particular rule or principle we should test the rule ourselves to see if we can achieve the ideal and carefully suggest criteria others might consider in making their own decisions.

There is a paradox behind many of the ideas and challenges presented in this article. I have been suggesting that permaculturists need to go further in applying permaculture principles and be more aware of how we fall back on conventional more deeply embedded learning. This old learning makes us susceptible to the subtle reward systems within society. It is these rewards which result in the solutions being recast as new forms of old problems.

On the other hand we should never forget that in nature things are relative and context dependent so we have to forego the certainty of a neat set of absolute rules. My greatest fears about the movement are the development of dogma and sacred cows. Some might say I am obsessed by attacking sacred cows (no offence to my Hare friends) especially those born of my own work.

We walk on a knife edge between the seduction of a defunct cultural heritage and the stifling bonds of dogma and even fascism. Constant self critical appraisal and the grounding of working with nature are the only ways I know to maintain the internal balance.

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