

Embedding fair share into the PDC and getting more permaculture on the ground on the Central Coast of NSW



Meg McGowan
Permacoach

Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgement of Country</i>	3
Our bioregion when we started	4
Conceptual research and methodology	5
Establishing our goal	7
Our trials, experiments and outcomes	10
1. <i>Embedding 'fair share' into the PDC: The group design process</i>	10
2. <i>Permashare: exchanging learning for labour: Changing the economic model</i>	11
3. <i>Translating the Permashare practice to group training: a new educational PDC model</i>	13
4. <i>Redesigning the PDC to align better with the ethics and principles</i>	14
5. <i>Offering an advanced PDC by portfolio - a post-PDC model</i>	19
6. <i>Permacoach: Redesigning the consulting model and creating a hub for local designers - community consulting</i>	21
7. <i>Design Lab: Providing students with an ongoing learning community - scaling-up and growing permaculture</i>	24
8. <i>Combining Permashare with consulting - integrating</i>	25
9. <i>Leap frog training: Supporting others to become teachers - building community learning structure</i>	27
10. <i>Building community locally: Finding our own edge</i>	29
11. <i>Designing the produce swap: The Matcham Holgate Produce Share</i>	32
12. <i>Beyond our bioregion: Feeding the algorithm- influencing others</i>	34
<i>Where to next?</i>	36
Appendix one: About us	39
Appendix two: Some of our teaching resources	40
Grateful Thanks	52

© Megan Joy McGowan 2021

Except as permitted by the copyright law applicable to your jurisdiction, you may not reproduce or communicate any of the content on this document without the permission of the copyright owner.

Acknowledgement of Country

I wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and to pay my respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and emerging. I extend to them my deep gratitude for the wisdom they have chosen to share. This is their land and always will be.

I recommit to holding space for the voices, ideas and participation of first nations people alive today. I renew my commitment to not speaking on their behalf and to supporting and advocating for their right to speak for themselves.

A map would be helpful here to pinpoint where you are Perhaps show tribal boundaries as well.... not if you don't want to....

Our bioregion when we started

The NSW Central Coast sits between the major cities of Sydney and Newcastle. While there are pockets of significant wealth there are also a higher than average rates of separation and divorce, more single parents and more people living alone when compared to the State averages. There is also a higher than average rate of unemployment.

Our bioregion is primarily comprised of suburban sprawl and all of the consequences of this flawed design: including social isolation, poor access to public transport and services, loss of land to housing and destruction of habitat.

Most people living in our bioregion have access to land, although the quality of that land varies from high quality agricultural to poor quality.

The impact of climate change is already noticeable and there have been major weather events resulting in the loss of houses into the ocean, and flooding of low-lying properties. Fierce storms have caused major property damage and the significant risk of bush fires applies as much here as it does across the state of New South Wales.

The area also has unique and exceptional national parks, reserves and dedicated Coastal Open Space as part of a scheme that required developers to contribute ridge line bushland to the community. This helps to preserve the water table, prevents construction on those areas at greatest risk of fire and provides a corridor for wildlife. This is the only region in Australia to have implemented this scheme and it contributes significantly to the character of our home.

There have been lots of opportunities for local people to learn permaculture.

Since 2008, permaculture teacher Kerrie Anderson has intermittently offered a free introduction to permaculture course through TAFE. These courses are designed to improve the employment prospects of local people. There have also been various individuals and groups offering both introductory permaculture courses and permaculture design courses in this bioregion over the last decade.

Our geographical location has provided local people with the opportunity to attend permaculture training in neighbouring bioregions, including Sydney based Milkwood courses, the Permaculture Sydney Institute at St Albans and Purple Pear Farm at Anambah. These all require students to pay for training.

Permaculture Central Coast is our local volunteer organisation that started in 2009 and has a transitioning membership that hovers around eighty people.

The significant growth in free online permaculture content now makes learning available and accessible to anyone locally with a computer or a smart phone.

Conceptual research and methodology

The question that inspired me

With so much permaculture available to local people, why aren't we seeing more permaculture on the ground?

There are hundreds of people locally who have completed some level of permaculture education but there is not a corresponding level of permaculture practice. I wondered what had happened to all those individual designs from PDC's and all the projects completed for TAFE courses.

I entered into a period of conceptual research using systems thinking methodology in an attempt to answer these questions. While no formal survey was conducted, the research included speaking with local people who had completed a permaculture design course and those that had an interest in permaculture but were unable to access further training. It also involved creative thinking and lots of 'What if?' questions. As a platform for further experimentation I formulated a series of observations about permaculture in our bioregion:

- Paid permaculture courses are beyond the means of many local people, particularly the PDC which typically costs between \$900 and \$2,000
- The traditional full-time two-week PDC is an enjoyable experience for students but many do not continue to practice permaculture after the course
- With hundreds of local people having completed various PDC's there is a noticeable lack of corresponding permaculture systems; it seems that plans don't get implemented as students hit a hard stop upon the completion of their course
- Travelling out of our bioregion to attend courses
 - can result in students learning methods and techniques not applicable to our area
 - does not build community locally
 - usually involves car or plane travel and the resulting environmental cost is inconsistent with the ethics of permaculture
 - doesn't build the variety and number of examples we need
 - There is no ongoing geographical community of practice after the PDC
- The PDC does not qualify people to work as designers and there is no mechanism locally to support them to do so
- There is significant local interest in implementing permaculture but many people don't know where to start, or where to go once they have started
- There is a tendency for local people to equate permaculture with organic gardening and/or self-sufficiency rather than appreciating the model as one designed to build connection and community; if we are to truly create a 'permanent culture' we need to design for interdependence and mutual support, not 'selfish sufficiency'.

Consider restoring land, and community.

I applied the ethics and the principles of permaculture to the task of redesigning what was happening locally and utilised the same design cycle that I would apply to any permaculture design task. I worked with my partner, Graham King, my colleague, Sandi Pointer and received input from numerous students and practitioners of permaculture.

Establishing our goal

Our work started with establishing a clear goal and our primary goal as a simple statement:

Get more permaculture happening on the ground: contemplating a different kind of human existence.

The goal statement was carefully chosen. our aim was not to do more designing or more teaching, but to measure success by the amount of quality permaculture that actually happened as a consequence of doing either, or, of doing anything else that resulted in more permaculture happening on the ground.

I was inspired by Rowe Morrow's observations from the first edition of the Earth User's Guide to Permaculture:

The main features of permaculture can be summarised as follows:

- *It is a system for creating sustainable human settlements by integrating design and technology*
- *It is a synthesis of traditional knowledge and modern science, applicable to both urban and rural situations*
- *It takes natural systems as models and works with nature to design sustainable environments which will provide basic human needs as well as the social and economic infrastructures which support them*
- *It encourages us to become a conscious part of the solutions to the many problems which face us both locally and globally*

So, our goal was not just about helping people to create food gardens or to live more sustainably on their own site. It was **about contemplating a different kind of human existence** and how what we do here might somehow influence that. My 'model from nature' for this was the vast mycelial network and how it supports the diversity of the soil biome and ultimately the diversity of all life. It is a diverse community.

Our approach to achieving this goal was aligned with the systems thinking approach to 'wicked problems' as this seemed the most appropriate. We did not know what 'more permaculture on the ground' would look like exactly, but we did know how to use the permaculture design model to head in that direction.

This approach is analogous to creating a garden. One does not start with a clear outcome in mind so much as a broad concept, a theme plan, and a commitment to responding to the site. There is no way to predict which opportunities will present themselves and so the goal is to remain responsive, and to recognise those opportunities as they emerge.

The alternative approach is more aligned to engineering. If you want to build a bridge then you have a clear idea of where you want it to start and to finish, and you need a strong appreciation of the tolerances, materials and construction methods relevant to bridge building. [At the end you will have the bridge which you designed and](#) dealing with 'hard systems' this approach is ideal, but any project involving living things will be dynamic, and a 'soft systems' approach allows you to head in the general direction of your goal while constantly checking, adjusting and responding.

The work is ongoing. It will never be done. Unlike a bridge that can be opened with the cut of a ribbon, getting more permaculture happening on the ground in our bioregion has no end point. There will always be emerging opportunities to try new things, and the work we have done is now spreading both geographically, as students take it with them, and virtually, as we share what we are doing with the online community.

I am hopeful that our work, and the application of soft systems methodology, will be of benefit to others working to get more permaculture happening on the ground in their own bioregion. Context matters and not everything we have done will translate smoothly to other places, but some of it might.

I would like to encourage others with an interest in our goal to adopt a similar approach; understand where you are and look for fertile ground and social microclimates. Keep heading in the right direction and embrace mistakes as learning opportunities. Stay focused on the big picture and work from patterns to details.

This approach is both exciting and challenging. It requires us to recognise that we do not have control and must be responsive to the circumstances that become available to us. I highly recommend it.



Our forest garden is also an analogy for soft systems methodology

Our trials, experiments and outcomes

1. Embedding 'fair share' into the PDC: The group design process

What we thought

The group design project within the PDC offers an opportunity for achieving multiple functions. It provides students with the opportunity to support each other in travelling around the design cycle while also giving them the lived experience of social permaculture in action.

It occurred to me that there was an opportunity to provide permaculture designs to those who might otherwise not afford them.

What we did -

I suggested that we offer the group design we do in a PDC to someone living locally, and that we select someone experiencing significant need.

Ljae lives in a housing commission property on the NSW Central Coast with Hunter, who is confined to a wheelchair and cannot communicate verbally. Ljae had attempted to grow food in her heavy clay soil with little success but was obtaining fresh eggs from some rescue chickens she kept in the back yard. Her garden became the subject of the group design exercise.

At the conclusion of the course my husband, Graham, and I decided to implement the group design at Ljae's place. We matched the donation of one of the course participants and used the total seed funding of \$450 to buy fencing materials, tools, seeds and sugar cane mulch (due to her back injury, moving mulch from a pile was not an option for Ljae).

What we found

The results allowed Ljae to produce most of her own food from a suburban block. This freed up her limited income to pay for a design course which has since resulted in her starting a successful small business, teaching art to children, with special classes for disabled children. Food security also gave Ljae a great deal of joy and comfort. People that have never been poor do not appreciate the anxiety and fear that comes with not knowing if you will be able to feed yourself.

Working with Ljae taught us that the more difficult the circumstances, the more opportunity there is for growth as designers. Dealing with a clay site that didn't drain well, managed by someone with a back injury from lifting her son who had little in the way of time, money or permaculture knowledge provided us with some interesting challenges. We needed to be innovative and kept returning to the ethics and principles when problems seemed insurmountable. Always they held the key to solutions.

The experience also confirmed the strength and flexibility of permaculture as a design pattern, and the ways it can be adapted to suit people in challenging circumstances.

Using a real client with genuine need was highly motivating for students and allowed them to deal with real world challenges. This provided superior learning outcomes to those provided by a hypothetical scenario.

Ljae's story is now part of our introductory permaculture course and continues to inspire students to get more permaculture happening on the ground. She provides a lived example of how small changes over time can achieve great things. We continue to give preference to people in difficult circumstances when choosing a site for the PDC group design, and encourage those students not designing for their own property to consider doing the same for their individual designs. This has resulted in some students forming an ongoing relationship with their clients that result in them assisting in the establishment and maintenance of actual permaculture systems.



Meg McGowan, Graham King and Ljae Ewell implementing permaculture in a suburban back garden

2. Permashare: exchanging learning for labour: Changing the economic model

What we thought

Working with Ljae inspired us to consider the circumstances of so many people in our bioregion. While there is certainly some great wealth here, the NSW Central Coast is home to many people in the most challenging of socio-economic circumstances.

We wondered how we might provide training to these people while also building community locally.

Ours is a large property and if we are to stay here into old age we will need help. Exchanging learning for labour seemed like a good way to do that.

What we did

I started coaching people one-on-one in exchange for their help in the garden. Usually we would learn as we worked, discussing the ethics and principles of permaculture and identifying them within the system. We would also talk about what these might look like beyond a gardening context.

There was no selection process for candidates. Somehow young people would find me and ask if I could teach them. Sometimes parents would ask if I could help them with a young person who was struggling. It seemed that within a few weeks of one person moving on there would be someone else that arrived to take their place.

There is great joy in working side by side with young people who have a genuine interest in permaculture. No paid assistance can compare to it. We have remained friends with the young people that came to learn from us and supported them in creating their own permaculture systems and aligned livelihoods.

What we found out

Work got done in the garden and people learnt permaculture with no money changing hands. Many people who could not previously have afforded paid courses learnt permaculture. We called this concept 'Permashare'.

There were many unforeseen benefits to operating in the alternative economy.

The young people that came to work with us learnt permaculture in a hands-on way that motivated them to create their own gardens and systems. They would not have been able to afford paid courses.

Permaculture seems to have the capacity to support improvements in the mental health of those that learn it. Many young people told us that they had overcome addictions and other dysfunctional habits through working in the garden and learning permaculture. This was an unexpected outcome.

We found that permaculture can help young people move from despair to hope as they learn practical strategies for reducing their ecological footprint and responding to the climate crisis.

We cooperated with nature when it came to determining how and what people would do in the garden. We found that young people diagnosed with ADHD worked well when given a range of different tasks to choose from and the ability to move between them when they lost focus. This approach helped them to better manage their condition and to progress to paid employment where this had previously seemed an unlikely possibility for them.

We believe that our experiences in working with young people have great potential for further development and research.

3. Translating the Permashare practice to group training: a new educational PDC model

What we thought

We wondered if it would be possible to scale the 'Permashare' model to group training. Our thinking was that this would make permaculture available to more people, particularly those in difficult financial circumstances, and that this was consistent with the 'Fair Share' ethic. We also hoped to use this as a mechanism for getting more permaculture happening on the ground.

What we did

Initially we offered an introductory permaculture course to a group of six people and taught them from our home. The course ran over four weekends with students learning on the first day and working in the garden on the second.

Over time the demand for a PDC grew and we decided to introduce one using the same pattern. We have redesigned what we do based upon student evaluations and the model now offers teaching during the first half of the day with work in the garden after lunch. This pattern ensures the best balance of energies for students, consistent with our commitment to cooperating with (human) nature.

We remain flexible in the timing and design of our courses, and typically design them around 'student zero'; this is whoever approaches us about our next course. We have taught through the week, on every weekend and on alternate weekends.

What we found out

There is huge demand for permaculture courses offered within the alternative economy. Our 'fundamentals' courses book out in around 48 hours and we have waiting lists for our PDCs.

It might be enlightening or entertaining for someone in better circumstances to learn permaculture, but for those facing financial and social disadvantage, permaculture is life changing. Teaching them puts our own energy to its highest use.

These students also bring great lessons in making do with less, reusing and repurposing that are borne from necessity. They are great learners and teachers.

Our commitment to responding to the patterns of our students means that we are able to teach more people from different backgrounds and circumstances.

Our garden is regularly filled with people that are joyful and fascinated by what we are doing. We make wonderful friends and continue to expand our supportive community of permaculture practitioners. We thought we were just going to exchange learning for labour. It has been so much more.

4. Redesigning the PDC to align better with the ethics and principles

What we thought

When the Permashare group training led to demand for a PDC we wanted to revisit our original research into why it had not resulted in more permaculture on the ground.

We applied the permaculture design cycle to the PDC and created something appropriate to the context of our bioregion.

What we did

Our process included sharing our observations about courses we had attended, imagining a course that was the best possible expression of the ethics and principles and then designing a curriculum and culture to reflect that.

The core design team for this phase included my partner, Graham, and my friend and fellow permaculture designer, Sandi Pointner.

We have now offered five PDC's using the new model and we are continuing to evolve it. Here are some of the changes we have made so far:

- Designing our PDC as a lived experience of social permaculture where the ethics and the principles are embedded into everything we do
- Aligning everything about the course with the ethics and principles of permaculture, including our resource choices, venue and waste minimisation
- Operating in the alternative economy so that those who cannot afford a PDC can still access training by working in the garden in exchange for learning (we can do this because we do not have venue costs)
- Only offering training to people within a defined geographical area; when people from outside our area enquire about training with us we refer them to someone local to them, or to suitable online training as we don't think it is ethical to burn fossil fuel to be here (I acknowledge that it would be a worthy investment to travel to learn with permaculture luminaries like David Holmgren and Rowe Morrow but it isn't justified in our case)
- Offering the course on a part time basis over several weeks so that students have time to practice what they are learning and to absorb the lesson content; this was a direct response to our observation that the full-time two-week course does not appear to have adequate translation from theory to practice and that many designs completed within this format are never implemented
- Teaching from home so that people can learn in a system that has been under permaculture for 25 years

- Stacking functions within the course; for example, lunches are shared vegetarian meals that cater to the dietary needs of everyone in the group; if one person is vegan we all cook vegan, if one person is gluten free we all cook gluten free; the experience of not eating alone in the corner from a lunchbox is both a literal and a metaphorical lesson in social permaculture and the quality of our lunches demonstrate the benefits of collaboration.

We have also made **several changes to the standard curriculum** to align it better with the ethics and principles. Here are some examples:

- Teaching permaculture as a design pattern applicable to any design task and explaining that while a garden is a useful model for learning permaculture, the scope of permaculture extends well beyond gardening
- Using a known text (The Earth User's Guide to Permaculture) as a significant part of the course notes so that students have an accessible and indexed resource at the conclusion of the course
- Encouraging self-directed learning between class days that includes reading selected chapters of the text and then discussing them in a seminar-style session during class
- Using the time freed up by the self-directed learning to greatly increase the design component of the course, including a number of sessions where students share their progress on things such as sector analysis, site analysis, client interviews, initial planning and troubleshooting; this has resulted in a higher standard of finished plans and a greater likelihood that those plans will be implemented; it has also resulted in a rich group learning experience for students
- Emphasising the broader context of designs by describing the earth as our primary client, and asking students to describe how what they are doing on site will address global issues.
- Including community connections and opportunities as an integral part of the design process so that students recognise the importance of thinking beyond the site and connecting themselves, or their clients, to an interdependent community
- Including a session on implementation and how to stage the application of their plans to their site, greatly increasing the likelihood of implementation and more permaculture happening on the ground
- Aligning the work in the garden with the course content when we can so that it reinforces the learning
- Focusing on game-based learning, Socratic questioning, sociocracy methods for sharing information, group learning and experiential learning rather than 'sage on

the stage' as part of our commitment to people care and best practice in adult education

- Teaching the ethics and principles by supporting students to identify them within our garden, greatly improving their ability to design systems that align with permaculture
- Providing a real client for the group design exercise and supporting that client to implement the design provided by students or to use it as the basis for their own design work
- Redesigning the design process so that the ethics and principles are applied as tools at each stage, greatly improving student understanding of the foundations of permaculture and the quality of their designs
- Facilitating ongoing connection between students beyond the PDC and connecting them to past students in order to build a growing community of permaculture practitioners in our region
- Asking past students to host site visits for the PDC so that current students can see what has been achieved after the course; this has proven to be highly motivating
- Developing unique teaching tools and models that facilitate students' understanding of permaculture (see appendix two for examples)
- Openly addressing the anxiety, trauma and distress that many people experienced during childhood schooling and the competitive behavioural patterns this model taught us all; we particularly focus on the tendency toward competition and the benefits of cooperation as an alternative
- Encouraging and supporting students to offer their design services at no cost to someone else within three months to reinforce their learning; students are encouraged to consider the choice of client; neighbours help build local community and people with disadvantage benefit from fairly sharing their skills.

What we found out

The garden surrounds students with practical examples of applied permaculture and we consider it to be our greatest teacher. Students greatly enjoy the opportunity to work within an established permaculture system and frequently comment that they learnt as much from the gardening as they did in class. It has become commonplace for students to identify which principles are evident in the methods and strategies they are using, and the parts of the garden they are working in.

Although our aim was to exchange learning for labour we find that the time students spend in the garden help them to achieve a deeper appreciation of the course content.

We found that the best way to manage work in the garden was to offer a range of tasks and to allow students to self-organise. We encourage them to consider the best process for the work and how to utilise the strengths within the group. Working together in the garden helps students to understand social permaculture and the benefits of team work. Their group design work reflects this.

Placing greater emphasis on the design component and providing shared learning experiences at each stage of the design process has resulted in a much higher quality of design work and greater student confidence. Traditionally students only see each other's finished designs and do not share their progress. We have found that sharing their work at each stage is a valuable shared learning experience that translates to good designs, a high rate of implementation and more permaculture happening on the ground.

Asking students to read content outside of class time worked well for some, but not for others. We are now exploring the use of recordings; We have observed that many of our younger students already enjoy podcasts and audio content, and those with literacy difficulties will find it easier to listen rather than read.

Teaching to different learning styles has been of immense benefit to students and we have seen a correlation between financial disadvantage and poor schooling experiences. We have had a number of students tell us that they are 'slow learners' or 'stupid' and always suggest that perhaps their real issue was poor teaching. Many have told us that our course was the first positive learning experience of their life. This has been particularly true for kinetic learners and experiential learners.

Many of the changes we have made have provided unexpected benefits. As an example, providing loose leaf tea and pots instead of tea bags has resulted in students saving time and energy while also sharing tea making and caring for each other. The experience of a shared vegetarian lunch has introduced many students to vegetarian cooking.

Our garden serves as a living nursery for graduates, with most of them taking seeds and cuttings from our site to use in their own designs. This reduces both the financial and environmental costs associated with creating their own permaculture systems.

Opening our home to students has inspired many to do the same and a number of our graduates now offer tours and workshops from their homes.

Our model has meant that members of the same family can attend the course together, greatly improving the chances of designs being implemented and minimising the risk of conflict that can occur when one family member seeks to impose permaculture upon others. A paid PDC would usually be too expensive for members of the same family to attend together and we see much more permaculture happening on the ground when more than one person from a household completes the course.

Learning within this model forms strong connections between students that continue beyond the course. They are part of the same geographical community and usually choose to stay in touch and to support each other in the implementation of their designs. This

significantly increases the likelihood of implementation occurring, and the quality of that work when it occurs.

We also found out that taking a 'soft systems' approach to the redesign was validated by the outcomes. We could not have imagined the depth or breadth of what we would achieve at the beginning of this process and would have been constrained by hard goals.

Our emphasis on permaculture as a design template applicable to any design task has seen students use it in a number of innovative ways. Here are a few examples:

- **Suzie has redesigned bush regeneration to incorporate permaculture and is sharing this model with other bush regenerators; she is also running a successful market garden using permaculture from her residential block**
- **Shannon helped her brother redesign his automotive business to shrink their ecological impact and the chain he works for have replicated the design across their business**
- **Lorrae is teaching permaculture methods and cooking skills to women in recovery from drugs of addiction having found the inspiration to deal with her own addiction while completing her PDC; she has also established a shared garden with her neighbour, removing the front fence to connect both spaces.**
- **Michelle has offered permaculture as an alternative to sport at her daughter's high school and also offers tours of her thriving suburban permaculture system; she is designing for others on a 'pay or exchange what you think it's worth' basis**
- **Daisy has realised she is a kinetic learner and has completed the first year of her regenerative agriculture degree, having previously assumed she would not be capable of tertiary study; she is also training to be a permaculture teacher**
- **Sandra has moved into the vice president's role for Permaculture Central Coast and is offering permaculture workshops from her home and her permacultured garden**
- **Chris and Tracy have established their own permaculture teaching business offering practical workshops in their local community and tours of their permaculture system**
- **Matt, Rhonda and Wanda have formed the Central Coast's first 'Permablitz' team to get more permaculture happening on the ground and to provide learning experiences to local people; all their 'blitzes' include teaching and learning opportunities**
- **Maria and Sylvia are offering 'eat the rainbow' experiences to local people where they introduce them to edible flowers and their highly productive tiny garden within a strata complex**



Students creating a hot compost pile using repurposed coffee bags in front of a bamboo fence they created using onsite resources; One example of a design from our PDC (credit, Sandi Eyles)

5. Offering an advanced PDC by portfolio - a post-PDC model

What we thought

This phase of our work was based on our observation that there was not much beyond the PDC, particularly for those wishing to become professional or semi-professional designers, or those wishing to design in the alternative economy.

Having initially run an advanced stream as part of the PDC we concluded that something requiring significant student initiative and high levels of self-directed learning would be more appropriate. Having advanced students within the class sometimes resulted in issues around status, with some advanced students adopting an attitude of superiority. This was not consistent with people care or good teaching.

I decided to design a framework that included mentoring and support, but which primarily relied upon the students' own motivation, as this level of commitment is a necessary part of being a designer.

What we did

All students completing our PDC have the opportunity to progress to the Advanced PDC provided they can demonstrate a sound foundation for further study through significant

implementation of permaculture on their own site and provided they commence the Advanced Certificate within three months of finishing their PDC.

Advanced students are provided with personal support and mentoring on a 'pay-what-it-is-worth' basis, including payment in kind. They are welcome to work in the garden or to exchange goods and services for our support.

To qualify for the Advanced PDC students must complete the following:

- Two designs demonstrating a high level of understanding of the ethics, principles, strategies and techniques of permaculture
- Twelve hours coaching someone in aspects of permaculture relevant to that person's circumstances, evidenced by a letter from that person detailing the benefits they received from coaching
- A minimum of two hours teaching a group on a permaculture-related topic (with the opportunity to teach within our PDC where possible)

All student services must be provided to clients on a 'pay what you think it's worth' basis, including payment in kind, or for free.

Students are encouraged to select their clients either based on need, with a preference being given to those that are experiencing disadvantage, or based on that client's potential to employ the student to implement their design, thereby providing a stepping off point for moving into professional designing and coaching.

What we found out

Knowing that there is something beyond the PDC has proven to be highly motivating to those doing the PDC. They are eager to prove their readiness to participate in the program by implementing their plans.

The advanced model provides two more people with permaculture designs, one person with coaching and a group of people with some form of permaculture training, all of which contribute to more permaculture happening on the ground.

Coaching clients greatly increases the likelihood of the design being implemented.

Operating in the alternative economy means that nobody is prevented from completing the advanced certificate because of their financial circumstances. 'In kind' payments have included a range of goods and services as diverse as our students.

Because we don't specify a price, some students fail to provide what we would consider to be fair exchange for our time and energy. We are philosophical about this and hope that perhaps they pay it forward.

The model has supported people to move into teaching permaculture and some are designing on a part-time basis. Four have started permaculture-related businesses.

Because we operate within the alternative economy, students often choose to offer teaching, coaching or designing on the same basis. This makes permaculture available to those who would otherwise not be able to afford it.



Chris Kemmett is our most recent graduate from the Advanced program and has started 'Home Grown Permaculture' as his new business

6. Permacoach: Redesigning the consulting model and creating a hub for local designers - community consulting

What we thought

Traditional designing in permaculture has often involved the creation of a plan and the delivery of that plan to a client, along with recommendations for implementing it. This does not always result in an established permaculture system.

I had also seen some examples of poor-quality permaculture design, or good designs poorly implemented. Whether these designs were professionally prepared or prepared by owners as part of their PDC it seemed such a waste of energy and a missed opportunity when nothing happened or things went sour.

We explored the possibility of a coaching model that would help people to implement permaculture on their own site. We imagined this model as providing ongoing support and professional development to designers in our bioregion, including those students completing our Advanced PDC that wished to transition into professional designing.

We also recognised a niche market of people that did not want to undertake a PDC but did want to develop a permaculture system on their own land. We knew that the traditional design approach might result in nothing happening, and speculated that a coaching model would facilitate real change.

What we did

The first phase of this model was to coach others and to document what worked and what didn't. This required a refining of my own design process and creating a number of documents to assist clients in implementing permaculture on their site, including a self-directed sector and site analysis and a self-directed client interview.

The second phase was to coach some of our Advanced PDC graduates in the model and to support them in earning right livelihood. We created the Permacoach website with this in mind. We accept no commission or payment when coaches obtain work.

A Permacoach Facebook page and Instagram account were established to market the model and to share stories about our achievements. Both have attracted a significant following. I manage both of these with the intention of using them to inspire those beyond our bioregion to get more permaculture happening on the ground, and to engage with local people about permaculture's potential.

Initially coaches paid a quarterly contribution towards the costs associated with the site (either in money or in kind) but we have recently decided to cover these as part of our commitment to the permaculture ethic of 'fair share'.

All those that complete the advanced certificate are invited to join the Permacoach team. We have recently trademarked 'Permacoach' as a brand to protect their livelihood.

All of my teaching and designing resources have been placed on a google drive and all Permacoaches are given access. I also provide mentoring to anyone wanting to establish a consulting or teaching business.

We now have five coaches offering design consulting and teaching. They cover an area that includes the NSW Central Coast, Sydney, Newcastle and Swansea.

We also have established contacts with other permaculture designers, including those in the Blue Mountains region, Stroud, the Hunter Valley and Brisbane and we refer people from those areas to a locally based designer. We strongly encourage students to specialise in their own bioregion.

What we found out

Students on the PDC are inspired by the possibility of permaculture becoming their main source of income and can see a platform for making that happen.

It is possible to transition to right livelihood using this model. One of our coaches is now earning a living wage through designing and teaching. All are earning some income from permaculture.

Clients that have signed up for coaching services have successfully created their own permaculture systems without having to complete a PDC and at a comparable cost. Many would not have engaged with permaculture otherwise.

Learning at home on their own site is a preferable model for some people, either because their circumstances make attending a course problematic or because they learn better that way. Coaching is a much better vehicle for experiential learners.

Consulting requires a complex skill set beyond permaculture, including marketing skills and an ability to generate leads and secure clients. Many of the people that qualify as coaches view consulting as too high risk or still consider themselves to be under-qualified. I think this model is the start of something good but it needs to evolve beyond the current pattern.

Coordinating and marketing are both problematic as coaches are intermittently available and I don't want to generate more clients than we can handle.

There is high demand for permaculture coaches in our bioregion. I think I could train another twenty coaches and still not have enough people to meet demand.

Although we anticipated interest from those that had completed an individual design during a PDC this has not occurred. Most clients are new to permaculture.

We need to remain highly adaptive in order to respond to the needs of clients. There is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to designing or coaching.

Some coaches have found innovative ways to apply their skills to different projects and this has limited the time they have available for coaching. When this occurs, there is still permaculture happening on the ground, but not through this model.



Graduates of our Advanced PDC are entitled to use the trademarked Permacoach name and logo at no cost

7. Design Lab: Providing students with an ongoing learning community - scaling-up and growing permaculture

What we thought

We noticed that many of those completing the Advanced Certificate still needed support to develop their design skills. We knew from the PDC that sharing each step of the design process with others was a powerful learning tool.

We also wanted a regular event that supported those currently undertaking the Advanced Certificate. Ideally this would include shared learning opportunities rather than one-on-one mentoring.

Finally, we wondered how we might find a way to include local people that had obtained a PDC from someone else in our growing community of practice.

What we did

We have established the last Friday of every month as an opportunity for shared learning. People spend the morning in our garden, usually hand weeding or mulching, and can also use that opportunity to harvest cuttings, seeds and offsets. An informal produce share occurs as everyone offers up their surplus.

A shared vegetarian lunch that caters to the dietary needs of all those attending provides everyone with a reminder of their PDC and the embedded lessons regarding social permaculture; nobody eats from a lunchbox in the corner.

The afternoon is dedicated to a 'Design Lab' where anyone can share their progress on design work, seek advice from others or draw upon the collective experience of the group to generate creative solutions.

We continue to encourage would-be designers to offer their services to those experiencing financial disadvantage and to consider working within the alternative economy.

What we found out

This model is relatively new and it is too soon to know if it will result in more permaculture happening on the ground, but we feel confident that it will.

Feedback so far has been that past students are excited to meet others, including those that were not on their course, and to extend the number of connections they have within the local permaculture community. Two students have already decided to work collaboratively on a complex design.

Those that have done their PDC elsewhere tell us that finding a community of practice has motivated them to do more designing, or to implement the unrealised design from their PDC.



PDC graduates working together on creating a design for a small acreage

8. Combining Permashare with consulting - integrating

What we thought

Having established the benefits of the Permashare model we wondered if it might be possible to combine it with our consulting work.

What wondered if it would be possible to have a client pay a Permacoach to deliver training on their site and to invite local people to come and learn permaculture. In exchange the students would help the client to implement their design.

What we did

I was approached by a client that wanted to establish a mandala garden on a property they were developing as a retreat for people experiencing trauma or disadvantage. Her goal was to use the garden to grow food for guests while also exporting produce to the local homeless shelter.

Given the humanitarian nature of the enterprise I wanted to find a way to support this venture for the least cost to the client. The solution was to combine our Permashare and Permacoach models. The client paid one of our coaches, Tom Oliver, to deliver a workshop on creating mandala gardens. Students were offered a place on the course in exchange for their labour and a small donation to Coast Shelter.

The mandala garden was up and running within two days and one of our other PDC graduates, Tammy Flemming, was contracted to provide ongoing coaching and advice. This has transitioned into a regular source of income for her.

Thirty-two people over two days got some hands-on permaculture experience and teaching, many of them for the first time. Two have since become students and recently completed their PDCs with us. Three more have indicated their intention to enrol in future courses. One has become a Permacoach client.

With the ongoing support of a coach, the mandala garden is proving to be a highly productive source of fresh produce for the local shelter for people that are homeless.

What we found out

This model stacks multiple functions:

- The Permacoach gets paid work in exchange for their skills and the opportunity to transact in the alternative economy remains
- The client gets a lot of help at very low cost when compared to hiring contractors
- The head start on permaculture implementation is highly motivating and increases the chances of the client continuing to get more permaculture happening on the ground
- The people attending are drawn from the local community and this builds networks and relationships to everyone's mutual benefit
- The model provides a lived experience of social permaculture that leaves a lasting impression upon participants
- Participants are reminded of how much can be achieved when people cooperate
- Participants are inspired to learn more about permaculture and may become students or clients

The model was shared with the Permacoach team as a great way to get more permaculture happening on the ground while also supporting clients, teaching more people and possibly finding future consulting work.



The mandala garden takes shape

9. Leap frog training: Supporting others to become teachers - building community learning structure

What we thought

It is a long journey across the threshold from teacher training to actual teaching.

I have had the experience of spending many years coaching one-on-one because of my concerns around teaching groups only to regret not having started teaching groups much earlier. We talked about what kind of support would have changed that trajectory.

We wondered if our coaching concept could be used to support those wishing to teach permaculture.

What we did

I encouraged my friend and fellow permaculture designer, Sandi Pointner to teach her own PDC using our Permashare model, where students exchanged labour for learning.

We established a 'leap-frog' agenda where I taught the content on the first weekend with Sandi in attendance and she taught it on the second to another group of students at her home. Graham taught content at both sites.

We designed the content together and compared notes throughout the courses. The goal was not to have Sandi replicate our training but to provide her with the foundation for developing her own.

Half way through the PDC we swapped students for a weekend, so that mine could experience the animal systems unique to Sandi's property and hers could experience a site that has been under permaculture for over 25 years but which does not utilise domestic animals. This provided all of our students with a richer learning experience.

This model is now available to other students that wish to teach permaculture using our Permashare model. We will happily 'leapfrog' any course we teach.

We have recently completed a sandwiched PDC where students attended Sandi's place on Saturday and our place on Sunday. I also attended Sandi's on the Saturday to ensure continuity. Sharing the teaching across two sites has enriched students' experiences and learning.

I am also designing a course where students that completed our PDC will co-design their own introductory course, deliver it for free to any group of local people and then return to demonstrate the best components of their course to one another.

What we found out

Mentoring Sandi meant twice as many people received permaculture training and another skilled teacher was added to the pool.

Sandi recognised her own potential as a trainer and the students provided valuable in-kind support to her creation of an emerging permaculture system.

My own teaching has benefited by observing Sandi, and through the process of reflection that comes from teaching others how best to teach.

This model validated our curriculum and our teaching methods, with Sandi achieving a similarly high level of student satisfaction and ample evidence of permaculture being implemented both during and after the courses.

We believe that the Permashare model is uniquely suited to supporting other people to become trainers. It can be difficult to fill a paid course with students but Permashare courses always fill very quickly and ongoing demand for them is high. There is no need for us to compete.

Some students in Sandi's stream challenged the fairness of the arrangement where one hour of teaching per student translated into multiple hours of work from multiple students. We have found it necessary during culture setting to point out that an hour of teaching includes many hours of design and preparation. We also now offer students the option of paying \$25 per hour of training if they do not wish to provide in-kind support.

Students enjoy having different teachers with different styles and approaches. Diversity in teaching increases our ability to meet the needs of all students.

This experience had reminded all of us that designing anything with others will improve the quality of the design work. This applies to designing permaculture systems, courses, learning games, curriculums, businesses and social enterprises.



Sandi and her husband, Andreas, have converted an old car port into a teaching space so that they can teach from home and operate in the alternative economy; they will also offer paid courses

10. Building community locally: Finding our own edge

What we thought

I realised that although we had done much to build community in our bioregion there was still a disconnect from my immediate geographical community in Matcham and Holgate.

I initially thought that there would not be much interest in permaculture. These suburbs are affluent in comparison to most of the Central Coast and I assumed that the comparatively wealthy residents would have little interest in permaculture.

We also recognised that connecting with the immediate community involved dealing with a permaculture 'edge' where there was real potential for change. If we could live here and practice permaculture then surely there were others, and potentially those that had never heard of permaculture who would be impressed by the benefits of the design model.

What we did

I started writing a permaculture column for the local newsletter, published by the committee that ran the community hall. It contained introductory level permaculture information and advice relevant to people living on small acreages.

I have now been writing a regular permaculture column for the newsletter for over five years and the local interest in permaculture has substantially increased. I receive no payment for my work.

I also took on the administration of the local community Facebook group when it looked like being shut down. Neighbourhood disputes and poor behaviour populated the timeline and there were threats of legal action in response to libellous posts. When it looked as if the group would be abandoned I put my hand up to run it as an exercise in social permaculture.

I reset culture to require everyone on the page to introduce themselves using their real name and banned neighbourhood disputes, referring those experiencing conflict to community justice centres. Several volunteer moderators ensure that offensive content is quickly removed.

The Facebook group has grown from 400 to over 1,100 members that live locally. We have used it to find lost pets, support each other through extreme weather, lobby council for change, employ young people and promote local events. We have also raised funds and collected items for charitable causes.

There is a separate classifieds page for selling things, but our community page can be used to give things away. It is now routine for people to share photos of anything that would otherwise go to landfill and to share all kinds of items that are surplus to their needs.

The Facebook group has also become an informal tool sharing group, with items as diverse as log splitters, drills, horse floats, party equipment and bunting all being offered on loan with no money charged. This has reduced the need for people to own one of everything while building community and a culture of reciprocity.

What we found out

Overwhelmingly, most people value community. Their social privilege and political views do not alter this need for connection.

A geographical community is both different and superior to an online community. Geographical communities are much more diverse and challenge all of us to be kinder, more tolerant and more appreciative of the resilience that this diversity brings.

I think of the Facebook group as an example of the permaculture principle, 'the problem is the solution'. There is much to dislike about Facebook, but used in this way it has real potential to support the regeneration of community at a geographical level.

Setting and maintaining strong cultural boundaries is essential to the success of such groups. The occasional flurries of bad behaviour are dealt with quickly. Our culture speaks to the reality that most people are courteous and know how to conduct themselves without regulation.

Building community reduces crime. The Facebook page has been used to both prevent and solve crime, including an amusing pursuit of a person on a stolen ride on lawn mower where local residents posted his location as he went past their properties and this information was communicated to police.

I did not expect the newsletter to have much impact. I was wrong. People read it and it has resulted in an increased local interest in permaculture. I have designed and consulted locally as a direct consequence and we are working on making hügelkultur the first choice for dealing with fallen trees and branches rather than burning them.

It easier to build community than I thought it would be. The investment of my own energy is small and the returns continue to astonish me. Our area now has a reputation for being a great community and that wasn't the case five years ago. I realise that most people would rather live in community than isolation.

What has also shifted is the connection people feel with the environment. I used to be one of the few voices advocating for other forms of life and now people routinely share photos of wildlife, including diamond pythons, and offer alternatives to environmentally devastating choices. People suggesting chemical sprays or rat baits will receive several comments on alternatives.

There are intangible benefits to creating community that we did plan for. Living in a place where you are known and appreciated, where you are connected to others and mutually supporting each other is probably one of our deepest human needs. It would be difficult for us to leave this community. We feel truly at home.

Here are some examples of the ways the community have used the Facebook page:

- Someone wanting to make their own produce bags asked via Facebook if someone could loan him a sewing machine. Within fifteen minutes, three different people had offered him an unwanted machine, free fabric and the teaching skills of a local sewing expert.
- When a woman and baby fleeing domestic violence needed a cot the community provided a cot, mattress, linen, car seat, baby clothes and vouchers for the supermarket, all in under half an hour. The woman receiving this generosity was as moved by the spirit of community as she was by the practical assistance.
- When a member of the community died suddenly during pandemic restrictions the family were prevented from holding a proper funeral. We used the page to encourage everyone to decorate their letterboxes with flowers. A member of the community took photographs and had them made into a book for the family.
- During the 2019-2020 bush fire season the page was used to profile the various volunteers from our community that were part of our local Rural Fire Service brigade. The volunteers reported that this community support was deeply appreciated and it also resulted in several new recruits.

Connecting people through community is a great way to cooperate with nature and to achieve greatest effect with the least energy. It is human nature to want to live this way and to share and connect with others. The benefits to the planet are many; we are moving away from a culture of people being self-contained and needing to own one of everything, to one where people own less and share more. Living in community makes people resilient and mutually supportive, even if they sometimes don't like each other very much.

11. Designing the produce swap: The Matcham Holgate Produce Share

What we thought

My car-pooling companion for the 2018 convergence was my friend and fellow permaculture teacher, Kerrie Anderson. On our trip home we talked about establishing a produce swap for the Matcham-Holgate area.

We thought that this would be a good mechanism for sharing the permaculture ethics and principles and for building community locally. We also recognised the benefits of sharing any surplus from our own systems. As well as reducing waste we might encourage others to grow some of their own food.

What we did

We put a call out via the community Facebook group for other interested people and together we researched existing versions.

We applied the permaculture design model to creating our own version, and renamed it a 'produce share' as a consequence; swapping implies a like-for-like transaction and we wanted to encourage the lived experience of the permaculture ethic of 'fair share'. Our produce share operates according to the following permaculture-aligned principles:

- Give generously with no expectation of return
- Receive gratefully with no obligation of debt
- Share fairly with others and take only what you know you will use

We recognised that the 'swap' model left those without anything to share feeling uncomfortable and unlikely to attend. We decided to offer them the opportunity to donate to a local charity. We typically raise \$80 to \$100 for a local school, fire brigade or welfare organisation at each event. We have also used the produce share to collect food and toiletries for the local homeless shelters, bedding and supplies for animal carers and resources for the neighbouring primary school.

The produce share operates monthly from the garden of a local winery. It is regularly attended by around thirty to forty people that happily give away their surplus. It is as much a social event as an opportunity to take home someone's excess and has also become an informal teaching and learning space where growers and consumers exchange information. We have sometimes held workshops on food production, composting and waste reduction as part of the event.

What we found out

There are many more people growing food at home in our area than we realised. The Produce Share regularly attracts around thirty people and there is sometimes so much produce that we donate what is surplus to the local homeless shelter.

We have occasionally had someone attend the produce share and take more than their fair share. Some people find it very confronting to intervene on this poor behaviour but it has been interesting to observe how committed people are to protecting our culture of fairness.

Establishing a culture of sharing has supported us to collect items that practically support other organisations, including toiletries and cosmetics for a women's shelter, food and bedding for an animal rescue shelter and paper products for the local school.

Inviting other local people to participate in the coordination of the Produce Share has been the basis of new friendships and ongoing mutual support. Since we began, we have invited regular attendees to join the coordinating group so as to ensure succession.

As well as the immediate benefits of sharing surplus, encouraging local food production and building community, the Produce Share has been an instrument of cultural change. The concept of simply giving away surplus is a shift away from a mindset of lack to one of abundance.

The notion that we can receive without obligation has created a local culture where people happily ask for help when they need it and the concept of fairly sharing challenges all of us to be more generous and to contemplate the broader impact of our choices.

We weren't sure that encouraging people to just give things away would be successful, but people love it. There is something about the model that gently challenges people to recognise that having more than you need places upon you an ethical obligation to share it with others. We believe that this has contributed more generally to a local cultural shift where people give away all kinds of surplus items. This was an unexpected outcome.

The Produce Share provides both the coordinators and the attendees with a lived experience of social permaculture.

Aligning the event with the ethics of permaculture and openly promoting it at each event has inspired many people to learn and practice permaculture.



Happy locals at the Matcham Holgate Produce Share enjoy free food and community while Kerrie Anderson displays our principles.

12. Beyond our bioregion: Feeding the algorithm- influencing others

What we thought

Amongst all of the real-world permaculture I have also considered how the virtual world might be leveraged to get more permaculture happening on the ground. While I recognise the potential for it to be an agent for change, I acknowledge the inherent problems and the lack of alignment with the ethics and principles of permaculture. But perhaps the problem is the solution.

I also understand algorithms. I know that if enough of us focus on seeding permaculture into social media we might collectively influence policy makers, business owners and even world leaders to recognise that there is a growing body of connected people that not only want a better world, but know how to achieve it. The online community has the potential to operate in a way that is much more like a geographical community.

What we did

I write a blog on WordPress called 'Smarter Than Crows' and I have a linked Permacoach Instagram and Facebook account. I approach these platforms as being potentially fertile ground, but not the main focus of my energy.

My goal is to post once a day to Instagram which links to my Permacoach page. I also help to administer the Permaculture Australia page on a voluntary basis, in addition to the pages for the Matcham Holgate Produce Share and the Matcham Holgate Community Page. The blog

is an occasional thing when I feel I need more time and space to say something important. It is also used to share our designing and teaching methods with others.

I use social media to promote the work of other permaculture teachers and designers.

I have also started creating cartoons, having observed that they have a unique ability to reach people that might not otherwise connect with permaculture.

Here's one example of a successful Instagram post.

These photographs I took of my composted stretch jeans 'went viral', with many people commenting that they had never considered the impact of plastics in clothing, and adding that the photograph had changed their buying behaviour. These images have now been seen by over two million people. The jeans were auctioned to raise money for Permafund.



This is what is left after you compost stretch jeans; these images helped many people to realise that much of our clothing is plastic

My social media profile has resulted in a number of opportunities to spread permaculture. Most recently I have been offered a regular spot on ABC local radio to tell stories about how permaculture has helped local people. This will hopefully result in more permaculture happening on the ground.

Some of my content has been picked up by mainstream media and permaculture-specific publications and platforms.

What we found out

Social media can result in changes to behaviour and more permaculture happening on the ground. It is satisfying when someone tells me that something I posted to social media changed their behaviour. This happens surprisingly often.

Social media has the potential to be the tail that wags the dog. I have found that strictly limiting my interaction and ignoring negative comments are both essential. It is important to see it as just one tool.

Cartooning reaches people that might not otherwise engage with permaculture. It is particularly appealing to younger people. It is a great vehicle for communicating challenging ideas in an unthreatening way.

There is no way to predict what will or will not attract attention on social media and I believe it is a waste of energy to worry about it. Better to throw out lots of seeds and trust that some will germinate.



'Sunshine Sheets' is a cartoon about putting energy to its highest use

Where to next?

I have recently taken on the president's role for Permaculture Central Coast and I am now part way through working with the other volunteers on a redesign, using permaculture as our pattern.

We have already agreed to do away with the competitive election process and replace it with one where anyone that volunteers is welcomed and where roles and responsibilities are determined using a method aligned with permaculture.

We have reorganised monthly meetings to make them more welcoming. This has included redesigning name tags so that those with expertise are acknowledged and easy to find, and those new to permaculture are easier to identify and support.



APEX: Ask me anything about permaculture. I love to share.



SEED: I'm just beginning but full of potential

Two of the new name tags I designed for Permaculture Central Coast; we also have a sapling and a pioneer species; members select their own name tag and hopefully look forward to upgrading to the next level.

There are many changes on the way. It's just one more opportunity to apply the design cycle, together with the ethics and the principles. I am confident that it will result in more permaculture happening on the ground.

The metaphorical garden keeps shifting and evolving and I never know when the next opportunity might present itself. Careful observation will always reveal new points of leverage where a small investment of energy might result in great returns

For me, permaculture is a pattern for a better way to be human.





Meg McGowan
Permacultured human

<https://www.permacoach.com.au>

<https://wordpress.com/view/smarterthancrows.wordpress.com>

https://www.instagram.com/permacoach_me/

<https://www.facebook.com/Permacoach>

Appendix one: About us

Meg McGowan and Graham King live on three and a half acres in the Matcham/Holgate valleys on the NSW Central Coast.

Our property has been designed and managed using permaculture for over 25 years and includes an acre of regenerated bushland dedicated as zone five.

Our home features passive solar design, solar power, onsite sewerage treatment, complete dependency upon rainwater, a composting toilet and an extensive forest garden. Our primary yields are food, timber for fuel, habitat for plants and wildlife, carbon sequestration, oxygen and beauty.

Our green bin has been converted to a giant worm hotel as all organic material is processed on site. The red bin rarely has more than 30cm of waste in it and is often empty when collection day rolls around.

Our garden has been designed to help those with a love of landscaping to see that beautiful systems do not need to be dependent upon inputs. The garden thrives without irrigation, imported manures or chemicals (even the organically approved ones). We share the garden with hundreds of different bird species, diamond pythons, native mice, possums, lizards and wallabies. We do not keep domestic animals for food and prefer to support regenerative farmers locally. We have two very spoilt cats that have supervised morning walks and spend the rest of their time safely inside.

We regularly host free tours of their property for individuals and groups, and believe that the garden is our best permaculture teacher. This is confirmed by the reactions of those that experience the site.

Meg discovered permaculture in her 20's and started using the design model in her 30th after purchasing the first edition of 'The Earth User's Guide to Permaculture'. She is now almost 60 and has designed for friends and clients on a part time basis for over 20 years, usually in exchange for something other than money. She has also applied the permaculture design model to a range of diverse challenges, including organisational redesign, business planning, personal development and parenting. Meg is responsible for the living things within their permaculture system and for ongoing redesign and improvement.

Graham has a background in IT and a passion for science. He teaches earth sciences, including climate, topography and thermodynamics within the Permacoach PDC. He also provides technical support to the Permacoach website. He is responsible for the human-built aspects of their permaculture system and has constructed paths, garden furniture and a composting toilet using reclaimed materials.

We are both committed to redistributing a minimum of 10% of our income to earth care and people care and reducing the amount of stuff we own by at least 10% each year.

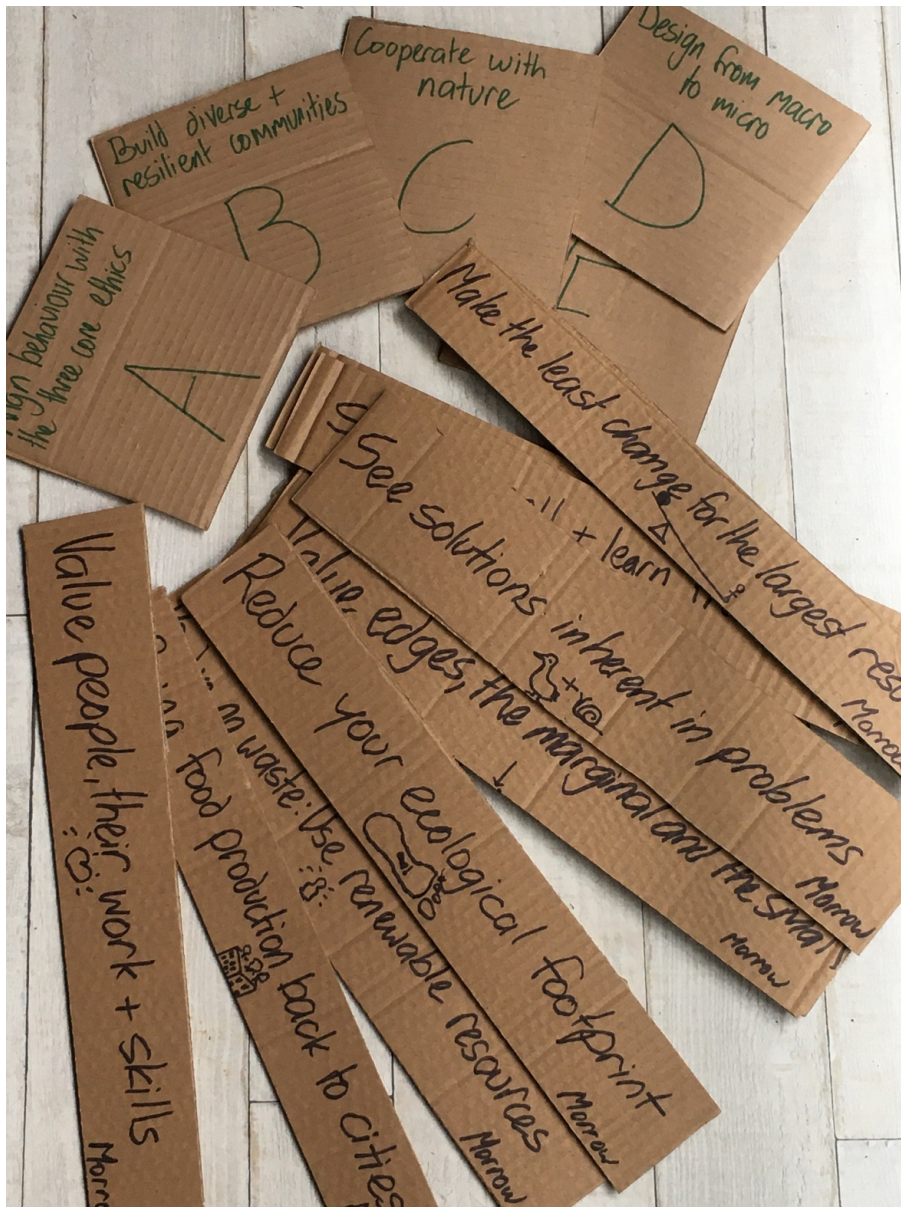
Appendix two: Some of our teaching resources

We use reclaimed coreflute real estate signs to create many of our teaching resources and hang them with reusable cable ties. The coreflute is donated by a member of our community.

Game based learning often involves materials created from old cardboard boxes. Using reclaimed materials in this way layers in the ethics and principles. Here are some examples:



Graham created this three-dimensional model of our area using old corflute signs. He has also made a similar model for our property using ply. Both are useful tools for teaching topography, sun patterns and water movement.



Reusable teaching resources made from cardboard boxes are used in a number of different learning games designed to help students integrate the ethics and principles into the design process.

The most popular of these is the 'reverse tour' of the property, where students find the various principles within our garden and then explain them to us as we wander the garden together.



Embedded ethics; Creating a learning environment where the ethics of permaculture are evident reinforces learning and demonstrates our own behavioural alignment. Replacing tea bags (which often contain plastic) with loose leaf tea has benefits beyond waste reduction. Students make a single pot for sharing with others and hopefully consider their own ecological footprint. They also get to taste home-grown herbal teas, encouraging them to grow their own.

We have also removed the bin from the training space, asking students to take home anything that cannot be composted and to find alternatives to single use plastic.

Our shared lunches are always vegetarian, preferably sourced locally and cater to the dietary needs of everyone in the group. Nobody eats from a lunchbox in the corner. This is both literally and metaphorically a lesson in social permaculture in action.

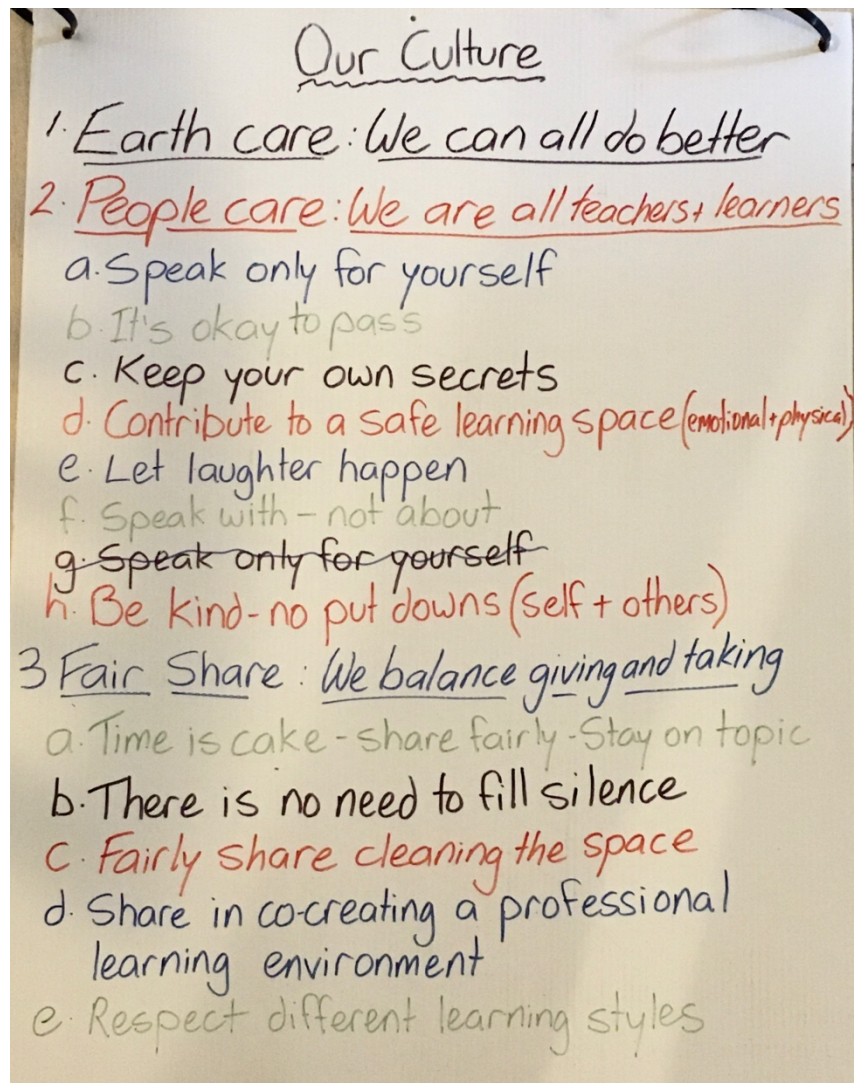
These details may seem small, but they have proven to be examples of the least change for the greatest outcome. They reinforce class learning and generate conversations among students. They often translate to permanent changes in their behaviour, including a reduction in meat consumption, a reduction in waste production and a reconsideration of their own habits and practices.



This collage in our training room toilet is an evolving work of art. Students are invited to trace their hand onto a page of *The Earth User's Guide to Permaculture* and to include it on the wall with past graduates. (We have a copy of the book reserved for this purpose).

The resulting art work is a visual representation of our growing local permaculture community and of students' commitment to using their hands to make permaculture happen on the ground. During the course they will have seen the hands of other past graduates and read their names. In the months following the course they will come to meet most of them.

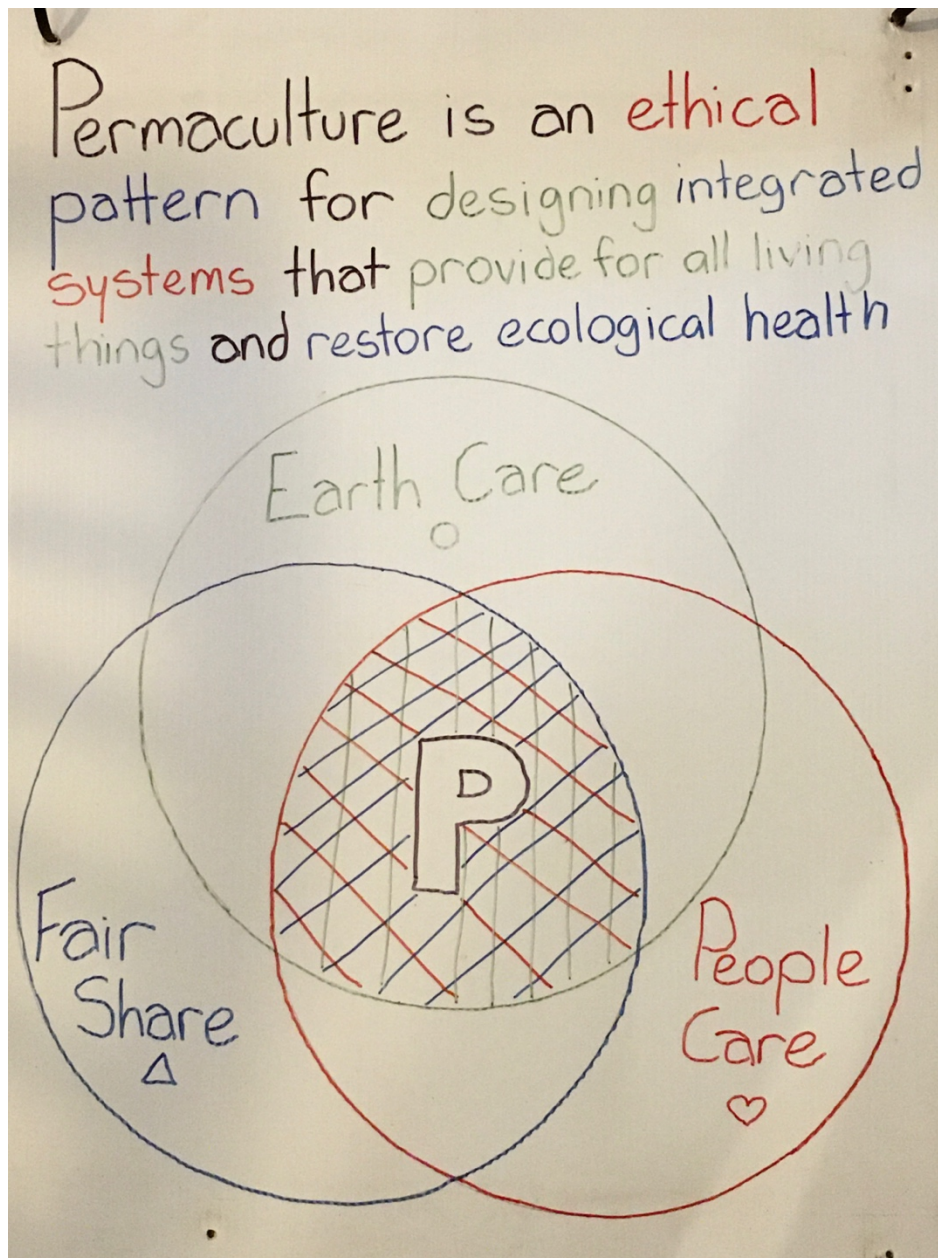
We place a strong emphasis on the significance of community and interconnectedness. Students usually start to form beneficial connections with each other throughout the course and these continue once the course concludes. Together we can achieve anything.



Our culture is framed within the three core ethics helping to establish them as the foundation of all that we do from the outset of the course. This is also a subtle reminder that permaculture can be used to design systems that are not literal gardens.

The error was left on the page intentionally. It's safe to make mistakes in our courses and to view them as learning opportunities. This is a good conversation to have early when many students are anxious. Somehow having the conversation around an actual mistake is more powerful than including 'it is safe to make mistakes' as a listed item. Our own behaviour needs to demonstrate integrity with our stated culture.

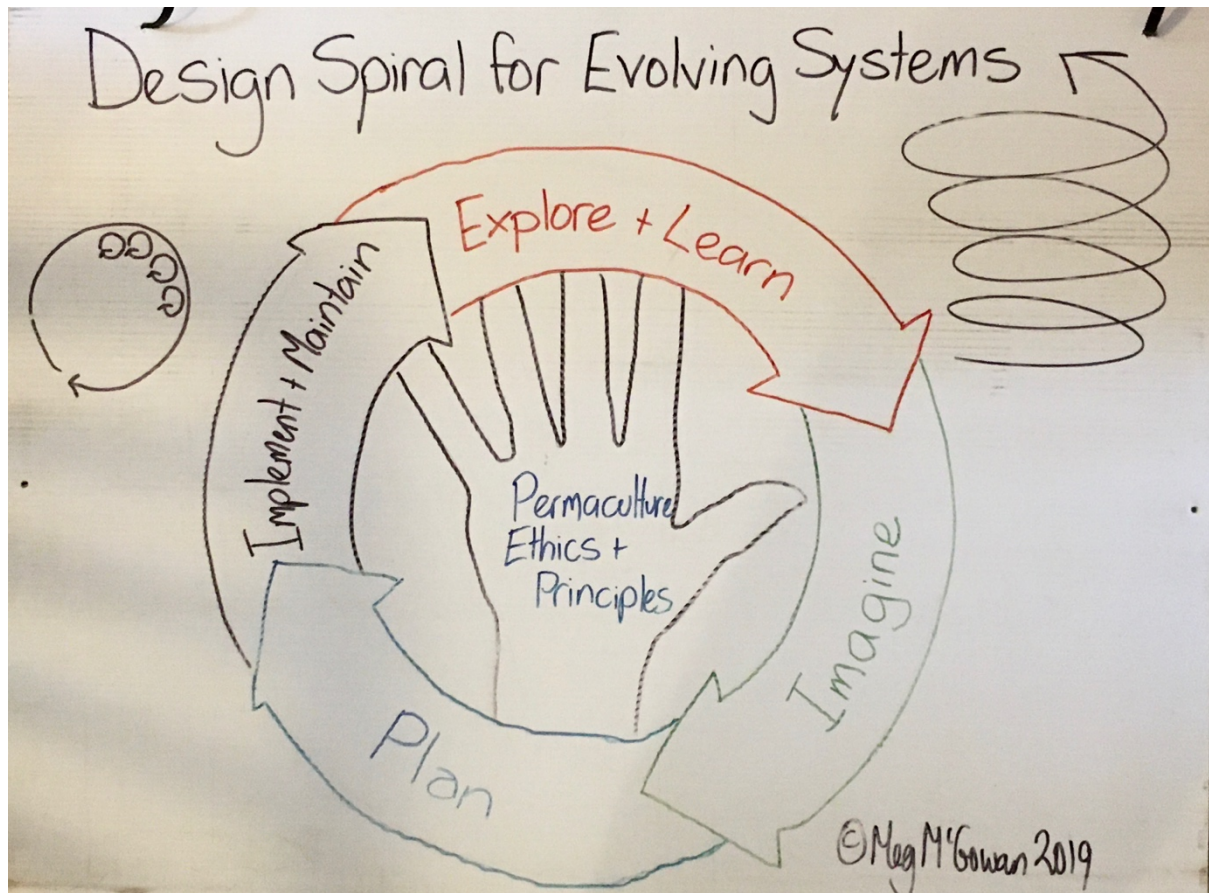
Of note is the omission of 'what gets said here, stays here' or anything similar. I am of the view that this cultural guideline does not cooperate with human nature and does not demonstrate good people care; group learning can quickly create a false sense of emotional intimacy and people may share personal information, only to later regret doing so. There are also circumstances where secrets cannot be kept. 'Keep your own secrets' is a more aligned choice.



Our current favourite definition of permaculture and the ethics drawn to show that permaculture requires alignment with all three; we cannot trade them off against each other.

Students are also encouraged to develop their own definitions and sharing these provides a valuable learning experience for them and for us. The process of defining permaculture promotes deep reflection upon what it is, and what it isn't.

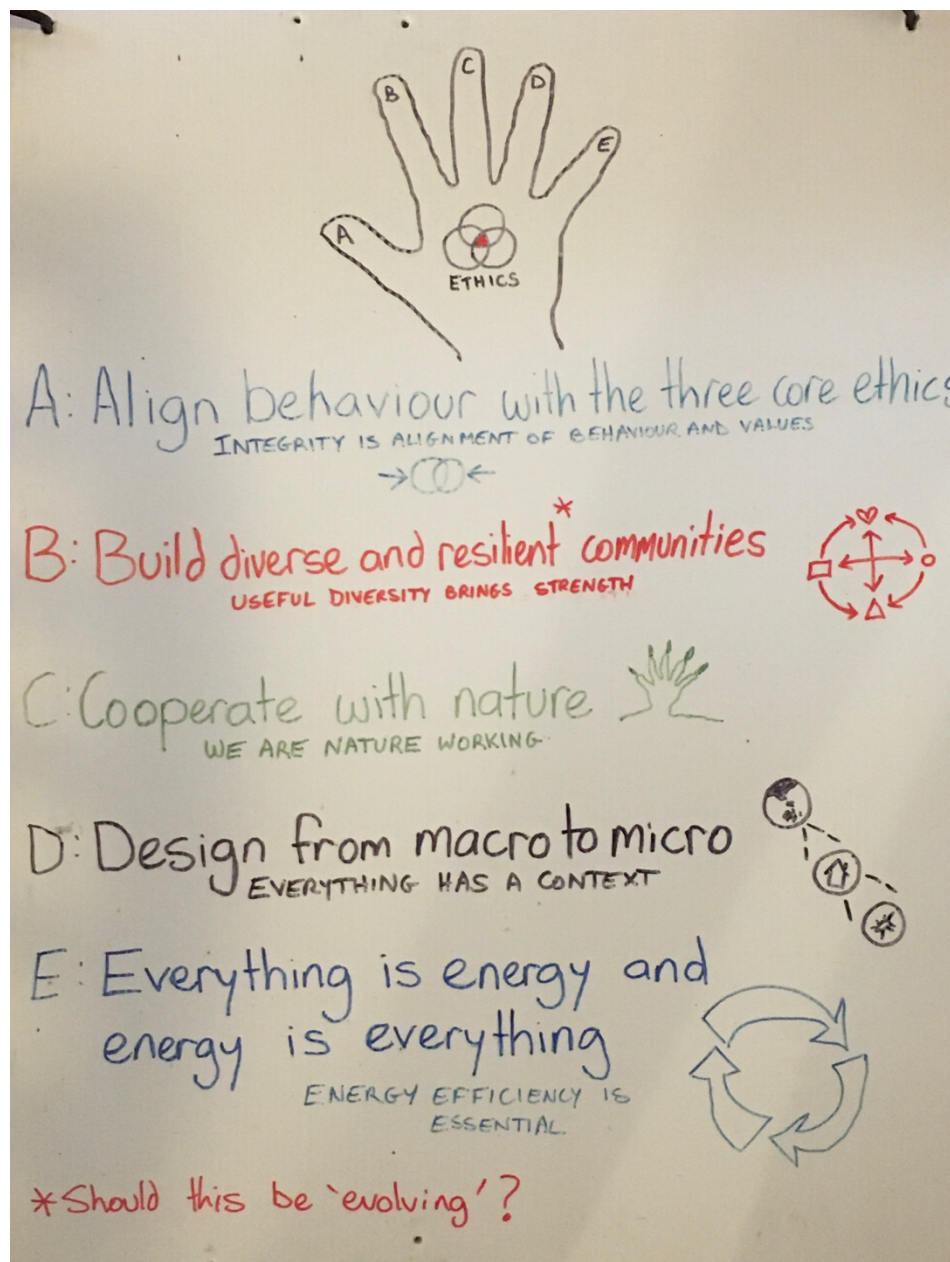
Of note is the deliberate removal of any specific mention of people. It is the nature of humans to be anthropocentric and we felt that "all living things" emphasised our interdependence.



Our design spiral was inspired by Dan Palmer's observations about the need for a clear design process within the PDC, and by Bill Mollison's spiral on page 27 of the designer's manual representing whole systems evolution in time.

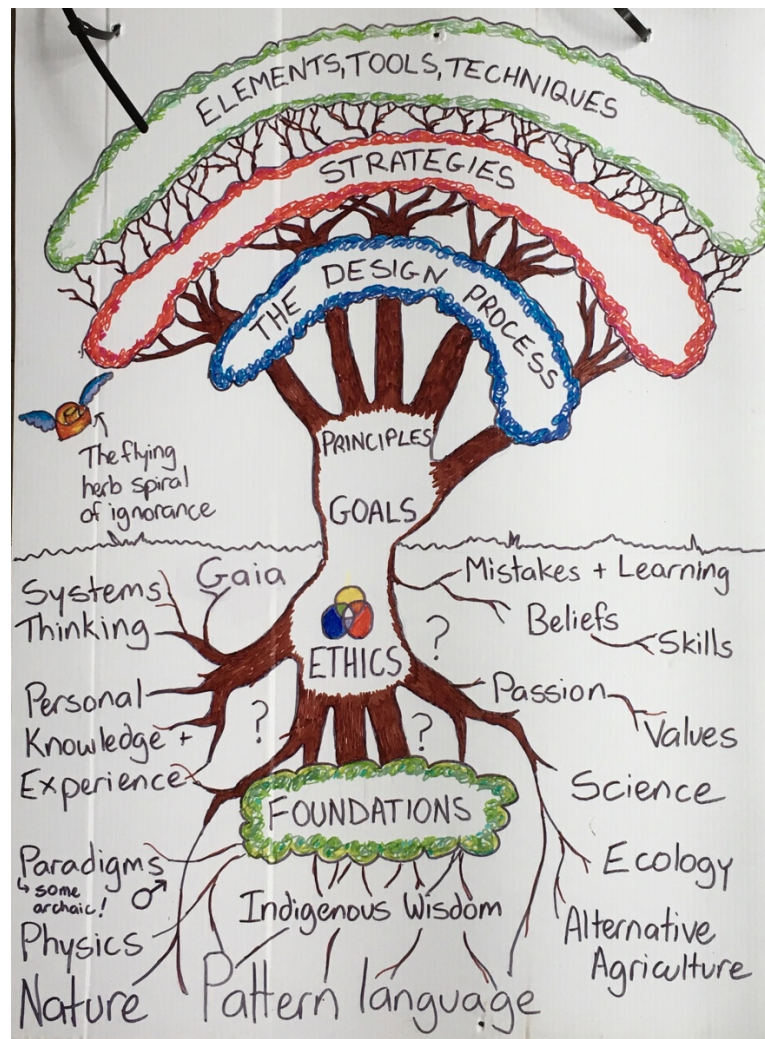
Students are guided through each stage of the design spiral during our course as part of their individual design process, and then support each other to travel it a second time during group designing. Note that the ethics and principles are central to the entire process. We have integrated them into each stage and frame them as questions that students can ask to assist them in designing. For example, "To what extent does this design use edges and value the marginal?" and "How have you used relative location to create an interconnected system?"

The diagram in the upper left corner is used to talk about those circumstances where designing requires us to create spirals within spirals. An example would be the identification of a serious contamination issue. We would need to explore and learn about the contamination, imagine creative solutions, choose a plan of action and implement it before proceeding with a whole of site design.



This macro pattern is used to provide students with a simple way to remember and incorporate any set of detailed principles. It is also used throughout the design process to develop questions that assist in designing, for example:

- To what extent does this design demonstrate earth care, people care and fair share?
- How much useful diversity is evident in this system? How does it respond to the two most likely disasters?
- To what extent does this design cooperate with nature and is there any aspect that works against it?
- How does this design respond to the big macro issues facing the planet and our species?
- How does this design harness energy? How has relative location been incorporated? Will the energy needed to realise this design achieve the greatest outcome for the least effort?

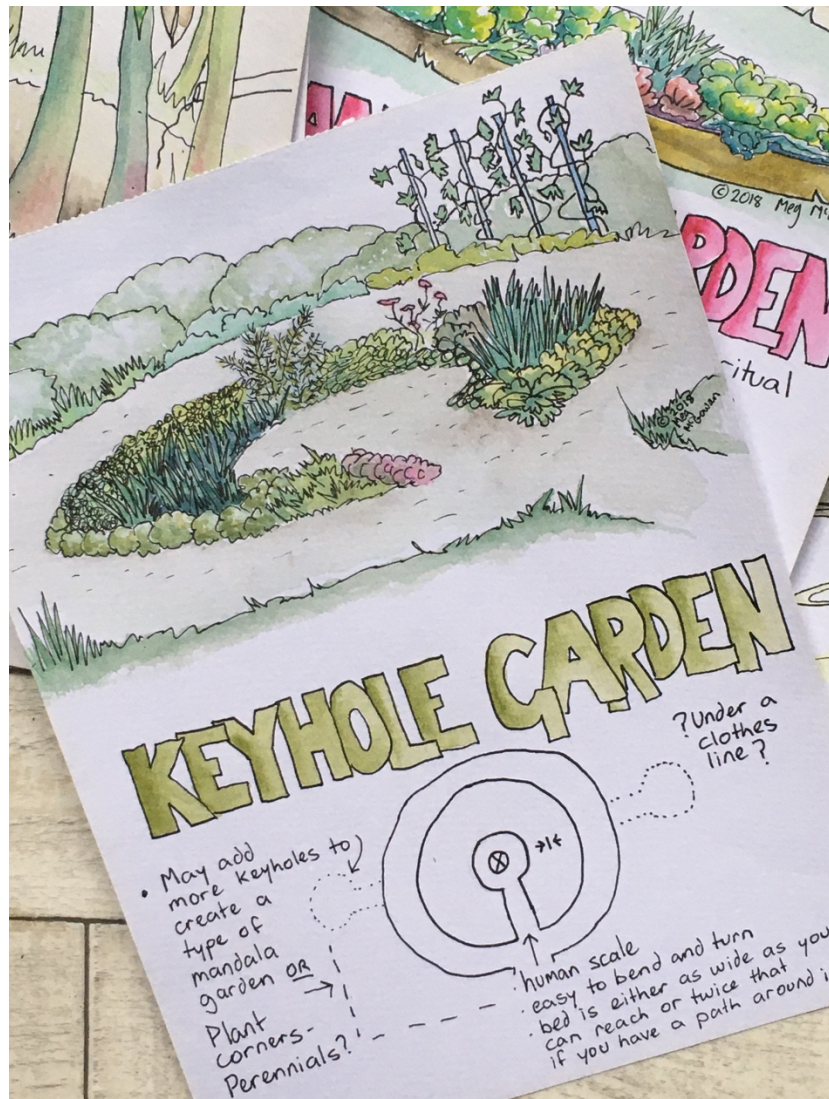


The tree of permaculture knowledge provides a one-page snapshot of the entire model and also serves as a map for our curriculum. We start our course at the roots of the tree and proceed upwards. There is an acknowledgement under 'paradigms' that some of the original frameworks for developing permaculture are archaic, particularly those involving gender discrimination and the 'traditional' roles of men and women. The significance of indigenous wisdom is acknowledged while also emphasising that permaculture's roots include many other influences.

The tree analogy reminds us that the ethics, goals and principles of permaculture remain relatively stable while strategies, elements, tools and techniques evolve over time. Many early versions have now been shed and serve to promote future growth. New strategies and techniques are emerging all the time.

The flying herb spiral of ignorance is a reminder that no one element can make any system a permaculture system. It is the interconnectedness of every part of the system that is essential to good design.

The use of the hand pattern as both the roots and branches connects it to our macro pattern for remembering the principles.



Elements cards are A4 paintings with accompanying notes that are used to familiarise students with various permaculture tools and techniques, to understand the difference between these and strategies, and to have discussions about context.

Our most popular game using this tool is for each student to select one, to explain what it is to the group, and to talk about where it would or would not be appropriate. Finally, they explain why they would or would not include this element in their own design.



Our garden is our greatest resource and wisest teacher. This zone one garden under the clothesline is just one example. We use this space to teach all of the principles of permaculture, challenging students to find every single one of them within this small garden.

We use this garden during tours to talk about how we build topsoil, how leguminous trees can help to fix nitrogen, how weeds can be food, how mycelium can create a natural water reservoir under a pathway, how flowers can be an important food source and why we prefer perennials and self-seeding annuals. We explain the difference between market gardening for profit and growing nutrient dense food for health and how a diverse polyculture can be naturally pest and disease resistant.

We also use it to dry our washing.

Grateful Thanks

“All things are connected like the blood that unites us. We do not weave the web of life, we are merely a strand in it.” Chief Seattle

Everything is connected and this makes claiming credit for anything at all problematic. No idea is ever truly original and to receive recognition for anything I have done compels me to fairly share the credit.

The permaculture concept, co-created by David Holmgren and Bill Mollison continues to resonate with people across the planet. None of this would have been possible without them. What a gift they have given the world and all living things upon it.

All of my endeavours have benefitted greatly from the generosity and patience of those that have created, practiced studied and taught permaculture, in particular our wonderful students who teach me so much. Thank you all and please know that you share in any success I have achieved.

I reserve special mention for Rowe Morrow whose book first inspired me many years ago to pursue a permacultured life and to endlessly consider the ethical implications of my choices. Rowe's work and life continue to challenge me to do better. Her vision of a world redesigned using permaculture continues to be the great template of my life.

I am deeply grateful for Lis Bastian's teaching and friendship, and in particular her presentation to the Canberra permaculture convergence in 2018. It left a deep impression upon me, particularly regarding the significance of community and the critical role it can play in achieving change. Our game for learning the principles is also inspired by her example.

I owe Nick Ritar, Kirsten Bradley and the Milkwood Permaculture team a debt of gratitude for helping to reboot my brain, and for their many fine examples of world-class teaching and writing.

Local permaculture teacher, Kerrie Anderson, has been introducing Central Coast people to permaculture since 2008. I am sincerely grateful for her wisdom and support.

My love and deep gratitude to my partner, Graham King, for his enthusiasm and solid support and to my friend, colleague and co-designer, Sandi Pointner, for her continuing willingness to play and create with me.

Finally, my boundless appreciation for my parents, Margaret and Brian McGowan, for raising me to believe that my neurodivergent brain was an asset rather than a liability.