

SIX LETTERS ON THE QUALITY AND CONTROL OF THE PERMACULTURE DIPLOMA AND CERTIFICATE – 2010

Written by Darren Doherty, Brock Dolman, Ali Sharif, Penelope Livingstone, Benjamin Fahrer

Letter 1: Darren Doherty

G'day,

I have had a few thoughts this morning whilst driving to the airport that relate around options for moving forward:

1. Without advice from Lisa and Bill otherwise it would appear that the role of The Permaculture Institute (TPI) as regards its provision of international education certification is changing. I would therefore suggest that we step up to the role of managing any successional processes as necessary such that the integrity of the movement is maintained. Out of respect for the role that the TPI has played up to now I think it is appropriate that they are involved in this process or at least given the opportunity to do so.

2. The PDC is an important part of the Permaculture story and its pedagogy has been resoundingly successful: though certainly not without its faults, foibles and frailties as it is a human construct after all! That its curriculum is pegged to Tagari's 'Permaculture: A Designer's Manual' (PDM) is not without its issues either, though it does provide a framework for course content based at the very least on the chapter list, notwithstanding the need for new content as times change, better practices emerge, are tested and we adopt or roll on. Regional and circumstantial adaptability has to be entrenched provided the core of the PDC is provided....again this could be based on the chapter headings of the PDM.

3. That a new international certification for the PDC be operated through the auspices of Permaculture International Limited (PIL). This obviously would need to be ratified by the PIL board and whatever other processes as necessary. I am not aware of any other organisation outside of TPI that has as broad a reach and is not involved in the business of being a course provider itself: establishing an independence that sends the right signals to the market.

4. That there be a link to the TPI PDC Certification via royalty payment for use of the Permaculture 'Egg' Logo on the new certificate such that in the market the succession is linked and as such is publicly endorsed by TPI accordingly.

5. Managing Teacher Registration: My personal belief is that the return to the market-based determination of teacher success is limited and does little to enhance or protect the Permaculture brand. People like me who have another 40-50 years plus of work to do in the Permaculture industry want to see Permaculture assume its rightful place in our regenerative work for the primary client, fellow humans and the species we share this place with. I would suggest that a mentor-based approach similar to that managed by Holistic Management International (HMI) be installed working around an agreed syllabus, and is priced on a sliding scale to enable lower income people access to certification. This way we have high quality mentors with mentoring new registrants. This already happens on a less organised scale with many of us already having mentored prospective TPI Registered Teacher applicants to the point of registration.

6. One of the amazing things regarding TPI administration of their PDC system was how they were able to do this on a shoestring, keeping certificate costs down (not without sacrificing GSM though!). I personally would like to see a similar approach taken here where the integrity of the

program is not compromised. Certainly with the web-technologies available to many of us this is entirely possible. Again it would be useful to have an open dialogue with TPI around such a transition where they are willing and able to proceed with a time effective due process of succession.

7. That we form a working group using Google groups to continue this discussion and collectively determine the way forward. Certainly there must be a shift to a more inclusive approach here leaving any histrionics and personality issues at the door. True functional leaders are inclusive, listen and are heard and this is important for us to get right if we want to in fact have a replacement for the TPI PDC certification and Teacher Registration. To borrow from the corporate lexicon, we 'industry stakeholders' either need to do this seriously or don't bother.

8. Tonight I received a couple of notes from highly respected Australian educator Rowe Morrow regarding 'Scandinavian Models' of Diploma assessment. I have attached a doc that was attached with her notes to me.

That's probably enough for now and I look forward to any further discussions around this. I want to also give notice that I am prepared to put in some time towards this and I would invite others to consider applying themselves similarly.

All the best to you all and I look forward to hearing from you soon....

Darren

Letter 2: Brock Dolman

Hello Everyone,

As I take a quick break to check email during a mid-morning break on week one of a PDC, I must admit I share the well articulated concerns of Ben, Darren, Penny & Ali.

Lisa's initial email to Ben (on the bottom of the thread here) mentions her "attached" letter to Ben, but that did not come through with Ben's initial email to us all, or at least me?

I think it would be helpful for us all to be able to read Lisa/Bill's letter, just so we can all be literally on the same page with their framing/rationales. Therefore as this discussion and re-design/re-imagination process unfurls, with all the creativity capacity and solutions oriented perspectives that this amazing group brings to bear, we can start from the same place!!

Thanks,
Brock

Letter 3: Ali Sharif

Dear Everyone

I agree with Ben and Penny that this is troubling news indeed. The curriculum is everything and the current situation muddles the issue of the Diploma and its crucial role in mapping out opportunities for so many young people in countries on other continents as they prepare to embark on a career in Permaculture.

In the Amazon we are in the middle of complicated and tricky negotiations with state ministry of education to incorporate a permaculture curriculum for rural communities. The notion that there is an international validation to PC is very appealing to them. Now there are open ended

and unclear issues.

Perhaps Lisa can forward some ideas that she and Bill might have on what are alternative strategies?

Cheers
Ali Sharif

Letter 4: Penelope Livingston

Hello everyone,

I just want to add my voice to Ben's. Even though I haven't gotten registered (yet), I am currently in the process of putting my curriculum materials together for submittal. I'm sorry to hear that the registration process is discontinuing. I would love to know why, can someone enlighten me? I agree with Ben that it would be good to have an entity that helps maintain the permaculture curriculum to keep it from drifting. It was this curriculum that drew me to committing my life to this process rather than somewhere else.

I agree with Darren that this is an opportunity, but it's just a matter of who has the capacity to follow through with integrity and timeliness. It seems like it would require a whole staff to handle this.

Suggestion: What if we contributed a percentage of our course profits (if there are any) to a fund that would support this effort.

Peace,
Penny

Letter 5: Darren Dougherty

G'day,

Thanks Benjamin...I will unfortunately have to be relatively brief as I am working on a detailed presentation for tomorrow and this issue could eat a lot of time I don't have right now....I have already sent an expression of interest to Robyn Francis around the issue of her ideas for filling this gap and to developing a more open and decentralised teacher registration process. Permaculture International Limited exists already and though its profile is not as significant as it once was, it remains committed to Permaculture education through its ownership and development of the Accredited Permaculture Training (APT) and could well be the vehicle that you speak of to develop the alternative to what The Permaculture Institute (as distinct from Tagari Publications which is a for-profit business under a separate trading trust as compared to the non-trading trust of TPI) provided up til yesterday.

I have asked Lisa about the Diploma and have yet to get a reply, though their office is closed til Monday so perhaps we'll get an answer then. It would appear impractical for the Diploma to continue if there is no certificate, unless you go to the Melbourne PDC and get a PDCC there in which case only those folks would retain that access....Anyways that is up to TPI. It would be great to get a statement from TPI (as distinct from Tagari) around the core functions of TPI into the future such that its graduates can pay that the due respect and plan their affiliations accordingly.

So it is an opportunity for an organisation to step up or for the fulfillment of the other option of people having their own certification programs from their own institutions. The latter is more localised though perhaps lacks the imprimatur of global certification. There are a whole range of

questions around all of this and many will be disappointed with this move as the TPI PDCC gave recipients a link to Bill's work and legacy and with the withdrawal of PDCC provision many will feel a loss there. That is somewhat iconoclastic of course, but that is part of the human intention and motivation.

Certainly there are many around the world who have 'escaped from the original home of Permaculture education' and developed their own strong and integrity rich programs for certification... it is more of an issue for those outside of those systems and again I see this as an opportunity rather than a threat, though initially a vacuum. The Holistic Management International model of Certified Educators is a process that I am now involved with and to me presents a good model to look at perhaps and takes things to the next step. Again its up to people which bus they choose to catch.

Sorry will have to leave it there and get back to the paid stuff!

All the best and thanks for all you are doing....
Darren

Letter 6: Benjamin Fahrer

Dear Lisa, and to those concerned,

The decision recently made from TAGARI to discontinue registering teachers is unfortunate as I regarded TAGARI as leader in holding a bar amongst us teachers to stay true to the curriculum presented in the PDM. I have been able to provide a high level of standards and also found that the rigour of presenting and going through the process of being registered by TAGARI (although lengthy, 8 months in total) was so extremely valuable as a teacher. Geoff Lawton was such a proponent of becoming certified through TAGARI as well as Darren, when I worked with both of them and was so impressed by their level of teaching. I had already been teaching and practicing Permaculture for 7 years and had no problem with getting students, I registered with you to make sure I was teaching what needed to be taught and to be apart of a team.

I also found that being apart of this team and standards of teaching was an important common place to speak from and with others while in Africa at the IPC9. I have a huge respect for Bill and your work and thank you for all your efforts. I only wish that you reconsider this decision and that this problem could also be an opportunity and that the design is unlimited, meaning that another way of receiving and reviewing applicants could be done, that was non centralised and could be done via internet, with centres wold-wide.

I know that if your decision is final than this will cause a whole new wave of the question around what body holds authority in calling Permaculture Permaculture. As a major networker and organiser here on the west coast of California I have been referring people to TAGARI and PRI as that institutional body.

Scott Pitman at the PINA has also stopped registering teachers (I am not sure if he ever did) and the whole concept of A Permaculture Diploma and who you get that through comes up for question.

I would propose that an International Permaculture Institute initiated under PRI and Geoff's master plan, with those known qualified teachers, be formed. I would like to help this process as I feel we could come up with a very positive and professional process with regional centres (As Geoff has already started setting up). Last week a dozen of Permaculture Visionaries here in California met to discuss and plan out courses and regional convergence, We are networking

here on a level that will be taking this to the next level and would like to do that with the wisdom and partnership of those of the TAGARI and PRI team as well as the models being worked on by Ali and Darren, as well as Doniga's Earth Action Mentor Program in partnership with a number of organizations. Those included on this email are those I have had conversations with and feel would add richness and content to this conversation and if you feel to include others whom would do the same, i welcome the input.

The question for me is do we work together or as separate entities? No doubt we are all apart of the same team just wanting to hear strategy....

Please let me know what your thoughts are on this and look forward to hearing from any of you on this topic. Please feel free to respond directly to me on this as well.

In best Practice
Benjamin Fahrer