Teaching Permaculture in Refugee Camps

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Teaching Permaculture in Refugee Camps

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We recognise and thank our teaching teams who are named in the final report for each PDC.

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Booklet formatted by Ruth Harvey
This book collates first-hand knowledge and experience gathered by the Permaculture For Refugees (P4R) team, who taught eight Permaculture Design Certificates (PDC) over two years (2019-2020) in refugee camps and settlements across three continents.

I became permaculture focused for refugees when I understood that refugees require more than organic gardening... in losing everything, they need to rebuild community around land and food security, and would benefit immediately from learning about permaculture while they are in limbo.

And I remain convinced that the PDC is the vehicle for them even when imperfectly taught (can it ever be perfectly taught?) because learning through the PDC offers refugees many more possibilities: to design better living conditions in camps through growing food, collecting water, building composting toilets and grey water systems, and utilising appropriate technology for energy needs. It offers new ways of thinking and living harmoniously with the land and community even within the difficulties of a camp.

Developing and teaching PDCs in refugee communities requires a range of specific skills and learner-centred teaching; and in particular, knowledge of the whole project cycle with its different stages, and clarity about which are the teacher's and which are the host's responsibilities.

This booklet covers general points of how to prepare for teaching permaculture in camps, and also focuses on the skills, aptitudes and attributes that are needed in teachers, in order to achieve significant outcomes. It is easy for teachers to overestimate their physical and emotional preparedness for teaching well in this context, and to underestimate the underlying qualities required.

Teachers also require familiarity with the whole curriculum to estimate how much time and focus to put on special areas. Then they need to be able to adapt their usual (aural) teaching methods to those appropriate for students who may be working in a second or third language, with limited schooling and not familiar with new concepts.

This means converting verbal content, with all the chaos of translation, into visuals, even being prepared to change teaching methods halfway through a lesson. These
adjustments assist students learn, although they make time management more challenging. Finding the right combination of PDC content and process is instrumental in achieving overall good responses in camps.

It is wonderful to be able to say that despite the unpredictability and complex demands of this unique work, with variability of hosts, co-teachers, venues, local participation, camp management, accommodation, translation, transport and food - we achieved unusually high retention rates.

Overall, we trained about 250 people including host organisations, refugees and local villagers, and realised our objective of transforming refugee lives and places, through bringing permaculture design courses to camps. Not only did the teachers find this work both challenging and satisfying, but our six-month follow-up report shows exciting and diverse results, better than anticipated for a first group of such PDCs.

My grateful thanks to everyone who assisted - from drivers, translators, refugees, funders and supporters at home, and, of course, the teachers who were at the heart of this brave experiment.
Reflections on the 2019-2020 P4R Teaching Project

We knew that refugee settlements and camps were inhumane, brutal and largely unresponsive to the needs of their residents. We, the small core group members of P4R, decided to test a deep conviction that permaculture would be valued and effective for refugees in camps and settlements. However, we were aware that deep convictions aren’t enough and people need to see results.

The project was a gamble, somewhat of an experiment. A small group of us, Franci and Marguerite from Italy, Sarah from the Philippines, Antonio in Spain, and Rowe, Ruth and Jed in Australia, and later Greta and Kat in Malaysia, embarked on an ambitious program to transform the problems into solutions.

We designed a program of PDCs to teach refugees across continents, with a range of ages, religions, genders, languages and nationalities. We were directed to sites in Bangladesh, Turkey, Greece, Malaysia and the Philippines. We each experienced teaching at one or more diverse sites, giving us enough evidence to go out into the refugee and permaculture world and say, “We have something valuable and effective for refugees, camp managers, and humanitarian organisations”.

Early January 2019, three of us landed in Bangladesh to teach our first PDC. At the southern border, there are nearly one million Rohingya people in camps expelled from their country by the Myanmar military. There is almost no likelihood of returning to their homeland, and no guaranteed safety there, because their villages have been burned, razed and are now re-occupied by others.

We were lucky to be working with the Bangladesh Association of Sustainable Development (BASD) with staff familiar with permaculture. They organised everything, despite the unpredictable and spontaneous rules and regulations of the camp manager (in this case a high army officer), and the diplomatic difficulties of even starting courses: one for the local disadvantaged Bangla farmers, and the other for 25 participants from Camp 19, which hosts 50,000 refugees.

At the end of five weeks, in spite of sick stomachs and flu, clouds of mosquitoes, cockroaches, polluted water, persistent building noise and interruptions, and tree felling adjacent to the teaching tent, we had completed both PDC courses.

The results were exciting. The first course resulted in a design for a local school by the local people, and the second a design for a small section of the refugee camp – really a neighbourhood of a few thousand people. The project had begun well. Afterwards,
students engaged hundreds of local people, because there was the requirement that each participant teach 20 to 100 others. Within a few weeks about 2,500 people were practising elements of permaculture from nursery work to planting. Food gardens were wanted because camp food was basic and sometimes scarce.

Just weeks after we left, we began receiving photos of whole sections of the camp and village transformed, with other humanitarian organisations asking BASD what the secret was for such an effective project. Permaculture strategies and techniques are now widespread in this camp because people copy and learn from each other.

Over five months, we taught refugees across the world in diverse situations from Greek transit camps to Turkish settlements of Syrian women. We became familiar with different management styles, local cultures and the vagaries and frustrations of venues, interpreters and some hosts.

Students produced plans for camps and settlements, and designs for individual living spaces. Projects were started, and would be monitored for the next six months.

During that time, teachers explored a raft of new teaching techniques to facilitate visual and kinaesthetic learning, using hand-drawn posters and setting up role-plays for every situation to cope with the number of languages spoken in the classroom and mediocre translations.
We learned that about 50% of volunteer permaculture teachers were proficient in this context and could cope under challenging circumstances.

We learned that a change in emphasis in the curriculum was necessary and, that in camps and crowded settlements we must concentrate on small scale, intensive techniques and strategies. We were ready to write recommendations for would-be teachers working in refugee communities.

We learned that the communities we worked with are funny, co-operative, resourceful and apply their learning immediately. They are smart, even when starting from a low traditional education base. They all have strengths and skills to share, and much to teach us too. They are highly receptive and, along with some camp managers, value the opportunity to learn permaculture, and then to practice it, where individuality and creativity is usually actively discouraged. Participants enjoy having productive activities to transform the dusty ground, polluted water and environment of their living spaces into green, abundant gardens they can be proud of. Many went on to teach others, and so permaculture spreads.

Through the ethic of care of people, refugee camp communities provide a superb opportunity for diverse fields of learning, e.g. languages, new cultures, children’s care, women’s affairs, vocational courses for future livelihoods and human rights.

Permaculture promises to be potentially the most valuable resource anyone can offer refugees, and one which is open to every situation and level of ability.
Teaching Permaculture in Refugee Camps

Preliminary considerations

By definition, any work in refugee camps is confusing: Camps have all the appearances of being transient places despite the fact that the average length of time spent in a camp is 12 years and only 1% or fewer refugees are resettled. Residents don't want to stay there - they want to be home in their own communities.

Host camp managers, governmental and humanitarian organisations are responsible for the health, safety and food of residents, and are rarely skilled in building community.

To work in camps, you must like working with people and communities from a range of backgrounds. You need to be highly adaptable, seek local advice on cultural appropriateness, know exactly what is relevant or valuable for land and people and how to teach effectively.

**In order to teach a Permaculture Design Certificate for Refugees (PDCR), you must have a PDC with a track record of practical knowledge, hands-on skills and experience in teaching. You must be able to adhere to best practice and principles of learner-centred education.**

Skills such as Non-violent Communication (NVC) and stress management are desirable, as are personal characteristics such as patience, resourcefulness, flexibility and a sense of humour.

Developing a Teaching Project

Teaching and implementing a PDC, like any small project, requires a good understanding of the project cycle. So you need to know how to design and fulfil each step - preparation, teaching, monitoring and follow up - in order to achieve and demonstrate desired outcomes and accountability.

The Project Cycle

There is a recognised process cycle which usually looks somewhat like the flow diagram. You become familiar with it in order to teach in camps.
**PROJECT CYCLE**

**PLAN AHEAD**
- Set goals of place, time, outcomes
- Research relevant regions
- Draft training programs

**RESPOND TO REQUESTS**
- Do background research / stakeholder analysis
- Make draft plan for the whole cycle and funding
- Communicate outline and budget with funders
- Gather context-specific information re visas, protocols

**PREPARE DETAILED PLAN**
- List goals, objectives, timing, detailed budget, monitoring and evaluation
- Identity training resources, make checklist for host (texts, interpreters, curriculum, venue, accommodation, food)
- Obtain final confirmation of funding and send to host
- Set date and book tickets

**IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR TRAINING**
- Deliver PDGs and/or teacher training to refugees, host NGOs and locals
- Set up monitoring and reporting program for six months min
- Check in regularly or make visits
- Receive and collate progress reports and communicate with funders

**EVALUATE FINAL OUTCOMES**
- Collate progress reports with recommendations
- Write final evaluative document
- Prepare publications for wide dissemination
- Note ongoing feedback and provide follow-up support
Where will you go, and who will you work with?

You will need a host organisation in the camp to sponsor you before you go, and to support you when you are there. In fact, going without a host organisation is almost impossible. Also working with a local host organisation provides help with cultural information, translation, and offers additional sustainability if members are trained and can co-teach and follow up at a local level, once the international teachers have returned home.

To find a host, you can approach humanitarian organisations, or you can research internet sites which support or promote projects in camps and settlements. However, it’s best to be recommended personally to a local NGO or community service organisation (CSO).

The project document
The host organisation will require a project document indicating who will manage and share different stages of the project cycle. Usually, you write this project document, however if you are employed in a consultant role then the host may issue you with one. Without a clear project proposal/contract to deliver tangibles, you can have conflicts because of different assumptions.

The project document clearly sets out project goals, identifies all the tasks involved. It sets out the required materials, timing, anticipated outcomes, follow-up and recommendations.

It also separates and determines the roles and responsibilities for each of these areas, i.e. who sources the funds, how the budget is allocated, who carries out the monitoring, and who writes the reports.

Both you and the host need to agree on it before you arrive, and it can be tweaked after you arrive. Ideally the document is translated and available to refugees, camp managers and anyone else associated with the project.

As much as possible, allocate management and logistical decisions to your host organisation, who will have experience and competence with visas, accommodation, transport and utilities. You may have to provide security and child safety checks, and will usually be accompanied by someone from the camp management.

Remember that the NGO with the funding holds all the power.
Before you go

Regional knowledge, timing and preparation

Few developing countries have stringent occupational health and safety standards, so bear this in mind and prepare for contingencies. Before you set dates and book fares, check local factors such as long term and recent history, weather, and bioregional culture, graphic information available such as photos/maps, and public holidays. Allocate extra days for possible changes in timetable, so you can deliver the full PDC.

You can also research the location of health facilities and issues, travel insurance with medical evacuation. Check local norms and rules and appropriate clothing, particularly for women.

“Six days in Iraq were taken out of the training period for public holidays leaving only eight full days which had to be very long days to cover the content.” RM

All general information is helpful about the camp size, density, housing and access, demographics and languages. Whether the camp is temporary or permanent, closed or open, and the openness of management to a permaculture redesign of the camp. Camp management cooperation and support will only become clear once you are on site.
Collaborate with your host for preparing resources

Your course will run more smoothly with less stress when your host NGO or camp manager provides you with information before you leave. Be sure to ask them:

- what languages are used
- about relationships with local communities
- what land is accessible for teaching and demonstration visits
- about availability of local resources for practical sessions, such as plants, seeds, tools, building materials, pots, and manures
- to describe the specific nature of the teaching venue
- to translate major teaching documents
- about problems that you can prepare for.

Note: Some things you cannot prepare for, e.g. a 'normal' day has no particular shape in regard to times for prayers, food rations, school pick-ups, collecting water, other community commitments.

Your host normally provides these:

**1. A secure and dedicated teaching venue** available for the time of the entire course. Try to obtain commitment to this from camp management or NGO for the duration of the course or longer for follow-up meetings.

In many camps, 'pop-up' learning centres are integral to community development, conflict reduction and learning new skills. These may be made available to you as complementary spaces.

Ideally you will have natural lighting, reasonable temperature, good ventilation, good acoustics, and if possible, views and access to the outdoors, and different types of seating for different bodies i.e. carpets, cushions, chairs. Have water or drinks available at all times.

Before committing to the site, gather full information about noise, traffic, privacy and surrounding impacts.

“In Bangladesh, local Muslim women would not participate if any man, even the Imam, could see them... so privacy was critical for their full participation.” RM
2. A site for practical work.  
It may be difficult to find, but can be any small space but big enough for the whole class to see and hear you.

You need areas for propagation, soils and microclimate work, with some flat and some sloping land to teach contours.

You will need to demonstrate fundamental skills including those for a Zone One garden. You need agreement that students can continue to work on it, and it will require protection from people and animals.
3. Course materials
These are: some translations, whiteboards and paper, books, pens, tape, board cleaner, clips, masking tapes, scissors and access to a photocopier and internet. These are funded by the host in your budget and you send the money to purchase them ahead of the course. The materials remain the property of the host.

4. Competent interpreters in class languages. In an ideal world, your interpreter would be fluent in English as well as the second language AND experienced in the subject matter. Without at least two of these, the class can become chaotic and learning is difficult to maintain.

Where the translator has no experience in permaculture or similar concepts, information is often over-simplified or skewed. Not knowing the language takes agency away from the teacher and makes it hard to gauge students’ real learning. You rely heavily on your interpreter.

The best interpreters are conscientious and like working with communities. This is a dream and we rarely realised it. It is usually more like the following:

“There are four different language groups among the refugees (English, Farsi, Arabic and French), and teachers (Spanish, English and Greek) and interpreters whose native languages are Algerian, Arabic, Lebanese Arabic and Algerian French! The interpreters come from an agency in Athens daily, none is professional nor familiar with permaculture. They come late, want to go early, are late back from breaks... so hard to maintain continuity, and more so as refugees have to take time away for doctors, lawyers, and to sign various papers.” RM, Lavrio, Greece

Interpreters:
- Ideally teach to one language group per class e.g. Arabic, Farsi, or Rohingya. The interpreter speaks this language, and your language, which might both be second or third languages for the interpreter.
- Build a relationship with your interpreter. Make opportunities to meet beforehand to discuss their responsibilities. Always greet them personally by name on the morning of each day and continue building the relationship.
- Try to meet your interpreters the day before and go over the subjects with them for the next day.
- Discuss content and how to translate it to get key messages across. Start with your Agenda poster for the day which is already prepared in English, and familiarise them with it.
- While teaching, check your pace of delivery by keeping eye contact with your interpreters. Be sure you are not too fast, and that they grasp the concept or vocabulary.
When it starts to go a little crazy, stay with principles of learner-centred education. Avoid reverting to formal education control such as shouting or orders.

- Discuss problems and their solutions with the interpreter and the class, even when it is easier to make unilateral decisions.
- Having more than one interpreter can be useful. Sometimes refugees are good interpreters and take this role when you do group work.

5. Food and snacks
Ensure there is money in the budget for lunches and breaks, and ask the host to provide them. In every permaculture course, the food and breaks are an integral part of learning, and building community.

6. Class composition and selection
Class composition requirements are set by the permaculture teacher. Everyone must be committed to 80+% attendance.

Participation is ideally based on the following criteria:
- Minimum of 30% women and aim for 50%
- Two thirds refugees, one third local community and host NGO staff
- An absolute maximum class size of 25 students. No-one is excluded on grounds of age, religion, sex or prior education.

“Two teenage children with intellectual disabilities were well accepted in the PDC in Kurdistan and could carry out most of the activities. The participants accepted them because we, the teachers did.” RM
**Check your approach**
Take a breath, sit down and reflect on your attitudes and goals for teaching refugees.

**Remember refugees are special**
- It is critical to recognise that refugees may have been through terrifying and traumatic experiences, are likely to still be worried about people at home, and that the camp is probably not a safe place. Emotional behaviours may not emerge in the first week.
- Apply cultural and religious sensitivity by bringing to the fore social skills and values of the students, and facilitate their use.
- Appreciate that refugees continue to live their lives in their homelands in their minds, and this remains the primary reference for what they do and how they see the future. Take this into consideration and talk about ‘home’.

**Acknowledge and engage** all those with experience in the topic e.g. farming, pruning, soil building, calculating roof capture, and contour map reading - and let them teach the class. Build local expertise because you will be gone and these 'experts' need to be recognised and will be useful afterwards.

> “The Syrian Kurds have long experience of diverse agriculture. They are part of the solution that Kurdistan needs, to recover the alarming damage to agriculture in this country.” RM, Iraq

**Identify gender needs** and provide protected or private working spaces for women and girls, and incorporate work for men and boys, such as constructing shelters, pergolas, shade houses, steps and grey-water cleaning systems.

**Note that the best teachers**
- respect their students, listen to them, consult them and learn from them
- know their permaculture content very well
- create a safe learning environment
- tailor teaching methods to their classes
Develop your teaching so that refugees build trust and confidence in you, themselves and with each other. Demonstrate reliability, integrity and loyalty to your students. You need good observational skills to sense potential or existing conflicts and act discreetly to reduce them.

Build relationships outside lesson hours with time to chat with and discuss challenges for your students. Ensure there is time to socialise with them and that they can socialise with each other. Note: interpreters are not always willing or able to translate ‘chat’.

You will leave one day, so you want to leave behind you a strong co-operating learning community.
Teaching imperatives

**Recognise the deep pain of feeling separated from ‘home’**
Value activities that cultivate relationship to their new places and connection to the earth. Provide positive images for greater possibilities where they are now.

**Build creative and respectful co-teaching models**
Acknowledge that all teachers are learning as they teach, especially in these contexts; respect that everyone teaches differently, and that teachers need time to prepare. A teacher training course provides you with the awareness and practices needed for a learner-centred classroom.

Check your mutual understanding of methods and principles. It helps to check in with your values beforehand and discuss what you find difficult. Work collaboratively, allow different teaching styles and keep communications positive.

Have daily ‘debriefing’ after the classes. Be clear, focused and constructive with feedback, directing it to the person it is intended for. Decide together on support and intervention, and the timing and methods of feedback. Include role-plays to illustrate challenging situations.
**Encourage students through group work** to find their own experts and to listen to each other. When ideas are difficult to transmit, identify the person who has ‘got it’ and ask them to explain it to the class, on the board, or by modelling.

**Supervise group work** to ensure students listen to each other, and are able to speak if they wish to. Frequently ask, “Are you listening to each other?”

**Know your topic** so well that going over the notes for an hour or so the night before and making a list of six key points for your hour and a half session should be all you require. Ensure that your teaching methods get your main points across. Because the class can be chaotic, always adhere to the learning objective for each session.

**Use a variety of methods**
Ensure that written materials are supported by visual or concrete models, and they are culturally appropriate. Where possible, by-pass language and use visuals, demonstrations, models, practical activities.

'Sage on the stage', or ‘chalk and talk’ do not work as teaching methods in these environments even with excellent interpreters. Where your interpreter is less than adequate, provide role-plays of almost every concept. Follow this with small group work in common language to reinforce their learning.

In addition to curricula objectives, you need to set and monitor your own. Be creative, adaptive, responsive and innovative, and keep course goals clearly in mind.

Relax when the class dynamics get difficult. Be self-assured while chaos and disorder are all around. Use energisers to target behaviours and desired outcomes.
Are you now ready to start teaching?

On arrival
You will need to ensure before courses start that the venue is ready for use. Visit it at least one day before the course to arrange the ‘room’, learning materials and meet the interpreters if you can. If that's impossible then get there very early on the day classes start.

Check the physical environment is comfortable (room, chairs, sound, warmth). In the case of materials, be prepared to purchase them yourself if they are important for the learners, e.g. we brought clean drinking water for the class when it was not provided. We also purchased snacks. Remember that participants may be hungry. Never assume that the participants have enough to eat, either before they arrive or at home. You may see people putting a biscuit or fruit in a pocket to take back to someone. Be generous and try to provide high quality nutrition. Everyone is happy when the food is good and sufficient.

Make sure you compliment the cooks when they are present, and ask them to talk to the class about the experience of sourcing and cooking the food. Cooks are part of your course team. Respect the need and scheduled timing of meal breaks.

Always have contingency plans for when the classroom is locked, or the white board disappears, or the driver is late, or no interpreter is available. Be ready to move ahead with the program and not lose valuable teaching time.
Core curriculum and competencies

Use the accepted global curriculum* as a guideline, allowing for the individual methods of each facilitator/teacher. It allows a richer opportunity for co-facilitators to learn and expand their teaching strategies and to vary teaching styles that facilitate a diversity of student responses.

It is rarely possible to teach the full course as if you were ‘at home’ and working in a familiar environment and language. However, there are core competencies that must be covered (see below). Curriculum may have to be refocused on climate differences and the time and resources available.

These are the internationally recognised criteria for successful completion of the PDC certificate award:

- 80% attendance
- personal design
- group design for larger sites.

Spell out these criteria to make them very clear from the beginning and throughout the program. You may have to give group or private individual reminders where students are not achieving these, especially attendance. Appoint someone to keep a roll.

The minimum curriculum is:

- Sector analysis for accurate design decisions
- Basic climate and microclimates analysis for effective designs
- Water audits of domestic and rural water: storage, use, re-use and cleaning
- Energy analysis and non-fossil fuel choices
- Soil analysis and knowledge of soil nutrition
- Introductory plant identification and propagation
- Design methods, including observation, zones, needs analysis and retrofitting
- Appropriate placement of zones for domestic, rural and urban sites
- Integrated pest control, waste management and disaster resilience
- Social permaculture as it affects local economy, land rights, ownership, and community management.

* The international permaculture syllabus has no curriculum, principles or strategies for dealing with traditional land held in common, land without fences, nor for shepherds who cross countries with their flocks of animals as in Afghanistan and Kurdistan. Western land tenancy and title is not relevant to two thirds of the worlds population.
Designing the camp/community

The process of designing the camp or community is a shared experience that will equip students to work together in their community with their new knowledge. By designing the camp site, they are making concrete decisions through discussion, applying their new knowledge to their immediate lives, and they learn more effectively.

The ideal achievement would be the transformation of every camp to an ecovillage with a friendly training centre at its hub, self managed by refugees. So write it into the design brief for your students.

Include in the design: construction of shared spaces for people to meet and learn, such as kindergartens, child care areas, private women's, men's and children's spaces, tea houses for men and women, neighbourhood meeting places, playgrounds and areas for communal food growing.
Monitor the groups working together on camp design. Working together promotes appreciation and trust of each other's strengths, experience and gifts. It brings out creativity and humour, reducing friction that could arise from cross-cultural and religious differences. These group designs will be presented to the whole class and be part of the certificate assessment.

## Course structure

Have clear learning outcomes for the course and each lesson. Communicate these to the class beforehand. Start analysis and design processes early in the course.

**Teachers' objectives and the stages of the course**  
*Time allocation below is approximate*

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<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
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| **First three days:** set up class agreements and class culture, while teaching content, to build:  
- trust in teacher  
- cooperation and participation amongst students and  
- overall learning environment for everyone. | **The next five days:** your objective is for students to acquire theoretical and practical skills together which they will later use in designing.  
What you are looking for is:  
- increased interest in the landscape  
- their drawings for accuracy and understanding  
- discussion and recognition of each other's expertise  
*Remember to facilitate a mid-way evaluation on Day 6 or 7 that checks for any discontent/conflict between teachers, interpreters and students.* | **The next four days:** students synthesise their knowledge in their designs, practical work and group discussion | **The last two days:** are evaluative, as students work on final designs for the camp and present these designs. This is when you see how much students have learnt and integrated into their thinking.  
*Final evaluations*  
Public presentation of certificates and party |

The final evaluation is of students, teachers and host's logistics and management.  
(See Rosemary Morrow's *Training Permaculture Teachers* for evaluative techniques used to corroborate results in this project (free on www.bmpi.com.au)
The permaculture teaching day

**Begin with morning circle:** Orient to the day and monitor learning at this time. Start each day with reviews and quizzes where students are asked what they learned from the previous day, and sometimes on a particular topic. This allows them to recall and reinforce what interested them and assess what they retained. Others also hear and learn from the speakers.

**Introduce daily program:** Outline the topics and timetable of the day, and leave these on display as a reference.

**Incorporate social activities:** Consciously introduce interactive activities from the start, especially those which reduce tension. Refugees recover skills and status through social moments, and light-hearted interactions. Building social confidence gives everyone agency and purpose. Activities require cultural knowledge and discretion - when in doubt, ask the group or the interpreter.

**End of day:** Ask students and teachers to bring materials for the next day's practical sessions.

**Daily teaching schedules** have a big impact on teachers and students alike:

"In Coxs Bazar classes were from 9.00 am - 3.00 pm. To manage this and miss the very worst of the traffic, we left at 7 and had breakfast at the teaching site. Then, finishing at 3.00 pm meant we could come home, flop down exhausted for an hour or so, wash clothes etc, even walk around the close village and then be ready for the evening's prep work for the next day. By contrast, in the Day Centre at Lesvos, we started at midday, then to finish at 7.00 pm. This didn't work well as teachers were tired and hungry, and ate late. Somehow we didn't do the prep in the morning as I had thought we could.

In Lavrio camp, we tried to start at 9.00 a.m. but students were not used to getting up and moving before midday. We mostly started after 10, then had to be out of the camp by about 4.00 pm. We had to cram lessons into remaining time or cut out the Morning Circle. People were always very late and it was difficult to stay calm about it. This reflected the tension and underlying drama going on there.

In Malaysia we started at 9.00 am, most people were there by 9.30; I always tried to have something interesting happening so they felt they were missing out if they weren't on time. As we were living in the same building as the classroom, we had no travelling time and were able to take a break and also do good preparation for the next day." RM
**Time constraints**
Adapt and adapt and adapt. Always consult with the group and get them to make decisions about times and timing that work for them.

“The timetable needed to be flexible as we worked out the best arrangement for the mothers and infants in the group, and, with consideration for prayer times. We tested out a schedule for a week and then checked in to evaluate it and make time for call-to-prayer.” RM, Camp 19, Tangkhali, Bangladesh

**Sometimes there is more interest than you can manage**
Ideally, schedule a second PDC as soon as possible, to build critical mass of graduates. Then if you are able in terms of time, money and circumstance, run a Permaculture Teacher Training for refugees so they can offer their own courses.

“The refugees carefully chosen for the course come from the four camps. There were two to three times more applicants for the course than we have... and pressure to get accepted was great.” RM, Lesvos

![Image of a group of people in a meeting]

**Limitations of bureaucracy, camp management, camp culture**
You may have to bypass these when materials or other resources are not supplied. Find another person in the organisation and work with them. It is always preferable when the managers understand that the courses will reflect well on them, and be valuable for their future work with refugees.

Expect corruption in the camp, and often in management. It manifests as violence, power-play and trading in drugs, alcohol, women, children, and siding with camp factions. As a result many refugees do not feel safe in the camp and this can undermine their learning.
**Daily debriefing for teachers**

After class, allow time for a meeting with teachers and interpreters, and let students listen if they want to. Each person is able to speak without comment or interruption from anyone else. Each person asks another in the group the questions below. Don’t give praise or commiserate. Allow whatever time a person needs to answer each question. Keep to the order from negative to positive reflections.

A good simple feedback which covers most issues is:

- What was hard? What was challenging?
- What was good? What worked well? Where are the strengths?
- What you could do differently next time? Where is room for improvement?
- Where do you need support? Who can support you?

Follow with a teachers' discussion, rotating the convenor each day:

- Tomorrow's intentions or information needed to know e.g. camp commander is coming
- Dovetailing and ordering topics and themes

**Challenges for teachers**

**Manage without obvious control**

If the class is used to having controlling teachers, use different methods to obtain full attention - include those which require periods of quietness and reflection. Don't talk over students. Notice ‘great’ things, skills, gifts and strengths.

**Students who are illiterate in their own languages**

- Find out what they are good at and how they communicate ideas, e.g. story telling, dancing, role play, miming, acting, drawing.
- Build a positive group culture with peer teaching and group work.
- Use a variety of activities and teaching methods.
- Develop practical lessons that teach principles.
- Elicit and build on cultural knowledge.

**Student absences**

Set up a buddy system where absent students can be helped to catch up later. Build in revision, reviews, and quizzes to fill gaps and reinforce learning.

"Students came and went as they were near their houses, sometimes had to be absent on food distribution days.” Local community Tangkhali, Bangladesh

“... they bring obligations and stresses, eg doctors attending to sick children (almost every illness in the world has been seen here), talking to lawyers who ask for their stories over and over to test if they are telling the truth. Sometimes they return shaking from the experience.” RM, Lesvos, Greece
End of course responsibilities

Course evaluations
When you have completed your course, at the very least, discuss and record:

- Were the goal, mission and objectives of the course maintained?
- What were the main problems/impediments with this project?
- What were your solutions to these?
- What really worked well?

Identify main findings from evaluations
Collate objective and subjective successes by teachers, students and host organisations.

Three months after the PDC, collect information gathered by the host NGO about the ongoing impacts on learners and hosts:
- Implementation and yields
- Expressed intentions to continue
- Comparison with other courses with similar constraints
- Whether students use this information to work with others

Final written PDC reports
If you teach only one PDC, please write and lodge a report using our electronic Project Summary form found on our website (see p.29). P4R aims to collect data from as many refugee courses as possible to supply more accurate data for others doing the same work.

A good yield is where permaculture is embedded in the camps, and refugees are engaged in teaching others.
Recommendations

- If possible have an open meeting or taster courses/one-day workshops for interested people before the course starts. It would be even more valuable to have sessions with interpreters a day before the course to familiarise them with the curriculum, processes and concepts.

- Adapt the PDC course to suit the specific situation rather than a rigid PDC format. All your work is based on permaculture. You may alter the order or weight of topics to help your students. Be prepared to extend your knowledge and skills in different disciplines to suit target groups or context.

- Deliver the first PDC and see if a second is requested by refugees or host community, because permaculture is more likely to continue to be practiced if there is a second course. Include local colleagues as teachers for cheaper and closer travel, regional experience and languages. Follow up these two with permaculture teacher training.

- Devise projects addressing specific problem areas and educational needs, such as grey water management, pop-up schools, windbreak planting. These incorporate practical solutions which also support permaculture attitudes and applications.

- Where refugees are likely to be resettled in a third country, your focus and examples need to be appropriate for that country. For example, refugees may have come from farms in the Middle East yet are likely to be settled in big cities in northern Europe.

- There may be a need for a special focus on returnees, depending on the country of origin. “Syrian refugees in Turkey want to return to Syria and were quite demanding on how to improve lives when they ‘went home’.“ RM, Turkey
Follow-up mentoring and monitoring

Keep contact with your host NGO and assist them with strategies to continue the project and teaching. (It's not always easy to follow up personally, or to keep contact with refugees.) The NGO can make site visits and maintain contact with participants, and may also run workshops or a second PDC or a teacher training.

- Assist host organisations and local people with standardised monitoring guidelines which compare results across courses. These give monitoring quality control.

- Encourage host organisations and outstanding course participants to undertake further mentoring to increase their skills and knowledge. Local people who participated in a PDC can be very valuable mentors and supporters.

- After six months, ask your host organisation to send a final report on the results of the implementation of the course.

Note: Monitoring individual refugee post-course responses is difficult due to their mobility and different languages, instead support host organisations and local people to follow up with student questionnaires about changes made in their lives: new practical skills, on-going study, enterprises or other activities.
Concluding ...

Like a roller coaster, the whole experience can be exhilarating and also utterly exhausting. Teaching in refugee camps is full of extremes.

See our website www.permacultureforrefugees.org for more detail on each PDC with different cultural groups in different climates and management. We (P4R) are collating information on similar permaculture projects with refugees, at any stage of their journey. It would help our work if you could feed relevant data back to us about your project, using our Project Summary form: https://www.permacultureforrefugees.org/case-studies/case-studies-submission-form/. It can be filled electronically and submitted directly, then made publicly accessible through our blog, "News from the field".

Permaculture teachers equipped to teach in refugee situations will be in demand as projects arise in response to evidence of the value of permaculture.

We have tried to give you an outline and cover your expectations, so that having read this you will be better prepared than we were!
We wish you many rewards in your teaching. It is extremely worthwhile and necessary.

Rosemary Morrow and Ruth Harvey, October 2020
Appendix: Guidelines for hosting organisations

Ideally you are a local or international organisation able to communicate with local authorities on behalf of the invited teachers. These guidelines can stand as a basis for an Agreement, or Memorandum of Understanding, between a host organisation and teachers.

**Your project team will include:**

A *coordinator/operations manager* - one or more people from your organisation to manage the logistics, talk to teachers and organise the formalities for them about two months before they arrive.

*Teachers:* at least one experienced permaculture teacher who has worked in development or with refugees, perhaps with a co-teacher who needs experience in this field, and selected local trainers, preferably with work experience in sustainability.

**Your funder should allocate these items for you in the total project budget:** materials for the PDC, reports, feedback and follow-up.

**Advance preparations and responsibilities**

Your first step will be to negotiate with the appropriate authority to ensure that the course will be able to take place.

On behalf of invited teachers, you will:

- coordinate transport for teachers and support staff
- organise visa information, get permissions to enter camps
- meet teachers on arrival and accompany them to the venue
- translate teachers’ materials sent by teachers in advance
- organise snacks, meals, accommodation, venue for teaching, interpreters

On behalf of participants, you will:

- advertise, select people who would benefit from the course and answer their questions
- include local citizens and residents to participate in the class
- include staff of your NGO in the PDC who can continue to work with refugees after the training
On arrival
- bring together the invited teachers, local teachers, interpreters, cooks and drivers for initial welcome, brief and introductions, and to answer questions and expectations, re meals and schedules, cultural considerations and camp protocols.
- provide attendance roll to be filled in daily.

During course
Check daily with teachers and support staff that their needs for the smooth running of the course, and other logistical supports have been met.

Post PDC
- provide feedback from refugees and host community on meeting aims and goals
- send reports back to invited teachers and/or funding body as required
- follow-up on progress of permaculture projects
- encourage course participants to continue implementing permaculture on site
Quick quiz: your attributes

- Can you deal with officious and unreasonable bureaucrats?
- Do you really know your content?

- Can you teach without electricity and wifi?
- Can you embrace multiple loud calls-to-prayer in out-of-phase timing at 4am?
- Can you manage on up to five nights with broken sleep and still teach well?

- Do you like eating beans for six weeks twice a day?
- Or yellow fish curry for six weeks twice a day?
- Can you eat whatever is put on your plate?

- Can you go without your daily cup of tea or favourite drink for a month?
- Can you sleep through barking dogs, mice or rats in your room?

- Do you enjoy bathing, washing clothes and flushing the toilet with a bucket of water?

- Do you enjoy travelling where traffic is unpredictable, and most people don’t have a licence, and where there are unregulated emissions from trucks, bikes, carts, long traffic jams, and the ever-present likelihood of an accident?

- Are you calm when classroom tarpaulins leak with a sudden deluge of rain?
- Can you teach when your translator walks out with a headache?
- Can you teach about forests when no one has ever seen one?
- Can you improvise teaching Patterns with minimal materials?

- Can you keep your head when all about you are losing theirs????
Well then, my friend...
one day you will be a permaculture teacher for refugees...

and you will enjoy:

the responsiveness of learners
their quick understanding and immediate application
rich cultural exchanges, learning a new dance or song,
broadening of agricultural understanding
being immersed and accepted into other cultures
comprehending that the world is not all western
uncovering your own prejudices

You will:

gain a sense of working where it counts
see ongoing results
support people finding their autonomy
find that you can live without material surplus
and discover how much you value and enjoy difference.

And you will be taking a stand
against the injustices of capitalism and power.