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## Erasmus+ KA1 Training Course

# Forest School – Learning with Nature

**Open new neuronal pathways - Problem Solving Learning**

### Dates

12-16 May 2025

**Place:** Santo Tirso, Porto - Portugal

### Introduction

The Forest School pedagogical model, developed in England in the 1990s, is a methodology that is based on the development of the child's emotional intelligence and ethics, through regular contact with nature, in particular in the forest. There is now increasing scientific evidence that proves nature has a positive effect on children's health as well as on their physical and psychological development and well-being. Nature and forests, in addition to contributing to a better physical and psychological condition for children and young people, are excellent environments for experimentation, as well as for an integral, autonomous and stimulating learning.

The Forest School methodology fosters contact with nature and peers through exploration and play, aiming to stimulate the development of new neural pathways in the learning process in a meaningful and enjoyable way. In other words, it encourages individuals to use natural resources—free from predefined concepts—and peer interaction to find satisfying responses to the needs they wish to address.

## **Target audience**

- Teachers and educators who have experience with children
- School or education support staff, such as school attendants, psychologists, occupational therapists, etc
- Parents
- Educational leaders and headmasters in schools
- NGOs, scouts, Sunday schools, environmental clubs, etc.
- Staff from science centres, museums, environmental education programmes, protected areas, municipalities, educational facilities, training centres, NGOs, among others.

## **General objective**

The main aim of this training course is to clarify and empower educators, teachers, and other professionals (such as psychologists, occupational therapists, etc.) with approaches and tools that support teaching through problem-solving. The course creates space and time for genuine interaction between teaching and learning, fostering lifelong learning memories through the challenges of natural and real-life contexts.

## **Learning outcomes**

- Characterize the theoretical-practical context of the Forest School;
- Stimulate activities to promote the children's socio-emotional, physical and intellectual skills, either individually or in groups, in a natural and/or outdoor context;
- Promote activities that allow the exploration of different types of fine and gross motor skills, such as the construction and handling of different materials and tools;
- Acquire skills to observe and assess the children's behaviour, at an emotional and cognitive level;
- Acquire the skills necessary to do a risk assessment for outdoor activities as well as ensure safety practices;
- Identify common species of native fauna and flora;
- Introduce the creative process as a learning tool in formal and informal education.

## **Syllabus**

- Understanding the theoretical and practical foundations of the Forest School approach
- Designing activities that foster socio-emotional, physical, and cognitive development, both individually and in groups, in natural or outdoor settings
- Developing skills in observing and assessing children's emotional and cognitive behaviour
- Introduction to the creative process as a tool for learning in both formal and informal education
- The role of the facilitator in outdoor learning contexts
- Personal and professional empowerment techniques, including practical outdoor skills

## **Training Course Methodology**

The training course "Training on Forest School methodology" will take place on a fully face-to-face basis, with both theoretical and practical aspects occurring in an outdoor context, as most activities will take place in a forest environment. The training is organized in such a way that the trainee, when coming into contact with the processes presented in the course, understands the effect and the impact of this methodology, not only in terms of improving their skills as a professional/facilitator, but also in terms of the benefits for children. Each session will be carefully planned taking the group's profile into account. It is intended that trainees carry out practical activities, using different natural materials and tools, as well as learning to carry out an emotional and cognitive assessment of their actions and behaviours, with the objective of transposing the techniques acquired to the classroom and to students.

The training course will be led by trainers who have many years of national and international experience at the Forest School.

## **Programme**

### DAY 1

- The Principles of Forest School
- Forest Schools Benefits
- Field activities using natural materials
- The development areas of Forest School. Understanding and experiencing the benefits (Social, Emotional, Physical, Intellectual, Communicational and Spiritual)
- End Circle and sharing

## DAY 2

- The importance of the review processes
- Safety and well-being methods – Practical Skills: tools, knot and fire
- Sensorial Integration Activity: Participants will immerse themselves in a sensory experience, followed by a group reflection. Together, we will share what we learned about our sensations, emotions, and the experience of stepping outside our comfort zones.
- End Circle and sharing

## DAY 3

- How to look and understand the fauna and flora – This session explores how to observe and understand local fauna and flora, introducing basic principles of woodland management. It also focuses on meaningful ways to involve children in these processes, highlighting how hands-on participation fosters environmental awareness, responsibility, and long-term engagement with nature.
- Risk Assessment
- Building a Natural Shelter
- Team work in nature
- End Circle and sharing

## DAY 4

- The review Process
- The role of the facilitator – Neuronal Impact
- How to plan an outdoor session.
- Team Building - how to think outdoor to achieve goals.
- End Circle and sharing

## DAY 5

- Planning, preparing and delivering a session with kids
- Observation and Evaluation. After observing the session, participants will engage in a reflective discussion focused on key outcomes. We will explore what the children gained from the experience, examine the facilitator's behaviour and approach, and assess how the environment and activities supported the development of new neural pathways through meaningful, interest-led learning.
- Reflections on the course learnings.
- Course evaluation.
- Certificates awarding session.
- Course closure.

## Trainers

The course will be delivered in partnership with trainers from “Aprende na Floresta”, a pedagogical project specialized in Forest School training in Portugal.

[www.aprendenafloresta.pt](http://www.aprendenafloresta.pt)



### Cidália Gonçalves

With a degree in Pathological Anatomy, she later completed a Degree in Management and Industrial Engineering at ISCTE, carrying out work in the area of software development for the health area at Altice, NOS and Glinntt. Her experience as a mother of two children awakened the need to make new discoveries and to contribute to better living conditions, as well as healthier and more sustainable lifestyles, respecting nature, both for her family and for everyone else around her. This reflection helped her to discover new, holistic and integrative, learning methods, which contributed to better physical, social and emotional human development.

She completed this Forest Training course with Patrick Harrison in 2020 after having found a new direction in her professional and personal life. She created the Learn in the Forest project, of which she is currently the general coordinator.

### Dave Churchward

Founder of Little Acorns Forest Schools Ltd, Dave Churchward has been a Forest School leader since 2011 and has thoroughly enjoyed spending time in the woods with learners of all ages.

With a military background spanning three decades, Dave has always felt most at home outdoors, particularly in woodland settings. He has a strong passion for bushcraft and is also a qualified military combat survival instructor, regularly dedicating time to practise and refine his skills.

Dave is now qualified to train adults up to Level 3 Forest School Leader and also teaches First Aid—an ideal complement to the Forest School qualification.

For those considering a career change or simply looking for a new and meaningful direction in life, especially if they love the outdoors, Dave encourages them to get in touch and begin their Forest School journey.

## Venue

Colégio das Caldinhas, Areias - Santo Tirso

<https://colegiodascaldinhas.pt/>

Entrance to the Woodland: [Rua das Termas 754](#), 4780-068 Areias

## Course fee

€400 Tuition (*in accordance to Erasmus KA1 funding*)

The fee includes all logistics and training: preparation of the course, trainers, training materials, organizational costs, etc.

Accommodation and meals are not included.

## Recommended accommodation

We recommend the group staying together at the Educational Centre's accommodation: it has 20 rooms (all with private bathroom).

Prices:

Single room – 30€

Double room – 20€/person

Triple room – 15€/person

Breakfast not included.

Of course, if you prefer you can book other type of accommodation, but it would be better to stay all together as a group.

