

## **Forest therapy for human development**

In May, a group of facilitators conducted an introductory 4 day course for educators in Altea, Valencia in Spain. The course dealt with the themes and practices of forest therapy, reconnecting with nature, forest schools, and human development through different tools, such as the social dimension of the Gaia Education curriculum.

### **About Forest Therapy**

People who practice Forest Therapy, the first thing they feel, is that their stress rhythm slows down and anxiety levels go down to achieve self-regulation with the natural environment and a state of well-being. These are key benefits for excellence as educators for sustainability.

The transition towards a regenerative culture goes through the initial process of personal regenerative development, becoming connected to nature and regenerating our own inner landscape through the inter-education of our self. In the structure of holons of life, in order to achieve structurally strong changes it is important that changes occur from small holons to larger holons. In this case, the transition from the personal development of the individual to community social development, is the same as beginning with the social dimension towards the transition of the economic dimension.

The three dimensions of sustainable development cited - social, economic and ecological - are subordinated to our worldview. This is where the importance of re-connecting with nature is based, being connected to our origin leaving behind the human-nature duality. For this purpose it is necessary to regenerate our inner landscape, the way in which we communicate with ourselves and with those around us. To feel united to the environment we must feel united to our fellow human beings.

From this context, connected from the center of our Being for the transformation of the educational paradigm, the Intensive Vivencial Course Learning and Development in Nature, with an introductory format, has focused on the role of the educator as a key figure of support and pedagogical accompaniment that requires vision, personal work and coherent work tools for connection with the natural and social environment, towards an education for sustainability. Promoting the integral development of our Being to exercise our work as educators for sustainable development and the re-connection with nature, in this way, the educator as a multiplying entity, transmits these values in the transition towards a new educational and social paradigm.

### **Participants**

The course was carried out with four confirmed participants, and a fifth intermittent participant, all of them from Spain. What offered us a deep relationship and great mutual attention among all (5 participants and 3 facilitators). Sleeping in the forest - some of them with their children - a typical day began in the morning, around 6:30h with a session of forest therapy of around 4 hours. We continued with a break and breakfast and the second morning session was devoted to participatory learning processes in relation to the social dimension of sustainable development. During the afternoon session, we continued with facilitation of participatory learning on the role of the educator, curriculum for sustainable development and social dimension and re-connection with nature in the educational and personal development context.

### **Facilitators**

The Training Program for Educators Learning and Human Development in Nature has been promoted by the educational association PIN (Proyecto Infancia y Naturaleza), with the purpose of facilitating the complete human development through the education and re-connection of childhood with nature. PIN is a pioneer in Spain in the implementation and dissemination of educational resources. The course was delivered in collaboration with:

Asociación PIN, through Isabel Miralles, providing an approach to the origin, meaning and framework of the forest schools, its emergence as an integrating model connected to natural and social environment, and its contribution to the change of educational and cultural paradigm.

Antoni Camps, a Gaia Education certified trainer, facilitated transformational learning environments. He taught Gaia Education's 4Keys curriculum for sustainable development and introduced the social dimension and worldview dimension. He co-facilitated with the team through participatory learning practices and Forest Therapy.

Forest Therapist and Shinrin-Yoku guide, Manuel Rodriguez, whose project gained an award from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Food and Environment of the Government of Spain, introduced Forest Therapy and its capacity for human development and re-connection with nature.

### **Participant Feedback**

We received precious feedback from the participants:

*"It has been a very rewarding experience. A very practical and totally experiential course that has allowed us to connect with ourselves and acquire skills and tools for the day to day in our relationship with ourselves and with others.*

*The connection with nature has allowed us to feel, listen and let ourselves be. Go back to the roots and feel the strength and calm that the connection with the natural environment transmits to me.*

*Totally grateful for all that this coexistence has given us and with a lot of desire to repeat."*

Sarai Early childhood companion

*"Right now I can not put into words the ocean that has opened this experience before my eyes, everything will be small, but here I go:*

*I can say that during the therapies of the forest I have connected with my essence, with my deepest needs and my longings. I have felt the importance of the demand for listening and taking care of myself. I have felt a connection with the earth, the plants, the wind and the other beings that surrounded me ... and I have enjoyed it so much. I have learned that everything around me are mirrors that turn my gaze inwards, because everything is inside. The practical experience has given me tools for listening, communication and emotional management, but at a deeper level it has meant a rebirth in me. I could continue bathing in the woods every day. To thank from the deepest part of my being the care, dedication and love that Manuel, Isabel and Tone have placed in this experience. Thank you."*

Irma Music teacher

The facilitators are grateful for the group that was formed and the course of the experience. Definitely, it is the beginning of a beautiful path.