

RICHARD IRVINE

Trainer



Country: UK (but I feel European!)

Contact information: www.richardirvine.co.uk
learning@richardirvine.co.uk

Education: I qualified as a secondary school geography teacher and taught in school for 5 years.

Fields/topics you work in: Forest Education, Environmental Education, Outdoor Experiential Education.

Experience as a trainer:

YEE! 'Forest Welcome Home' project. Poland 2011

YEE! 'Environmental Education for Sustainability' project. Serbia 2014

I have delivered the level 3 Certificate in Forest School Programme Leadership in the UK since 2012

WHY DID YOU BECOME A TRAINER?

After nearly 20 years of working in formal and non-formal education, I had been thinking about doing more work with adults and other professionals in the field but my first training course came about by accident through YEE! In 2011 – the international year of the Forest, I heard about a training course in the Bieszczady Mountains in Poland and applied to a UK YEE partner organisation to attend as a participant. When it turned out that I was no longer youthful enough to qualify for funding, I offered my services as a course trainer. The organisers liked my offer and I was co-trainer for a week with Rysek from Poland.

In my day to day work in the UK, I run an accredited course for teachers, early educators and youth workers in Forest Education. I had been running Forest School and other outdoor education programmes for many years myself and felt that I had the experience, skills and knowledge to help other professionals in their own learning and development.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE PART ABOUT BEING A TRAINER?

I like the variety that training brings to my working life. Every course is different because of the mix of participants and the

backgrounds they bring to the course, the setting, the weather etc. I enjoy the challenge of adapting the Forest School Training course to the needs and strengths of the individuals in the group. As well as being the course facilitator and sometimes teacher, I am always a co-participant and I love it when a community for learning develops over the time we are together.

When I am working in a new place, for example on the banks of the river Danube in Serbia, often there is very little time to get to know the locality and it is necessary to really think creatively how to best use the sites available to give the participants the richest possible experience. Working with other trainers really enhances this and I have been lucky to work with some inspiring professionals from other countries as part of my work.

DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF AN ENVIRONMENTALLY-FRIENDLY TRAINER?

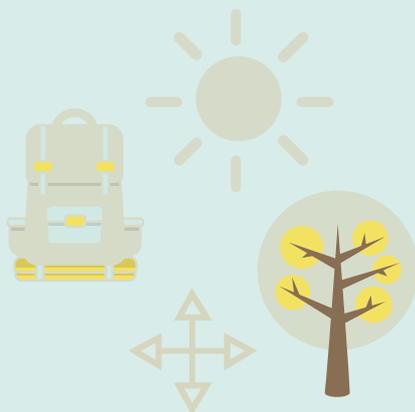
The short answer is, yes, of course. Education **in, about and for** the environment has been my main aim since I started working in Education in the early 1990s. In terms of Forest Education, I think that educators need to be very mindful of the impact of their activity on the ecosystem in which they are working.



I train participants in my courses to undertake surveys and ecological impact assessments on which they then base their management plan for the site where they run long term programmes. I think that as well as reducing our negative impact, we should aim to enhance the woodland we work in through management work to improve habitats for biodiversity. This can include tree felling and coppicing as well as tree planting, depending on the needs of the site.

I try and model sustainable behaviours on courses and use a lot of old tools which have been repaired and recycled rather than focusing on having the latest, shiny, new equipment. I use natural renewable resources from the forest where possible and promote the teaching of practical ways to engage people with sustainable management of woodlands.

In my work with children and young people, I still cling to the hope that by having direct, positive experiences of wild and natural places, they will develop bonds with those places and care for them and the wider world around them.



DO YOU HAVE SOME TIPS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO WANT TO BECOME TRAINERS?

The main thing I would recommend is to gain experience in the area in which you want to train. I see training and teaching not as a science but as a craft in which you need to serve a long apprenticeship. The apprenticeship is having diverse life experiences and reflecting on them. Attend training courses and try and figure out why the trainers are doing certain things in certain ways. Shadow a trainer you respect or help out with the logistics on a course and attend the planning meetings to get an insight into how trainers construct a learning experience.

If you wish to be a trainer in environmental education for example, then get involved with running lots of programmes with lots of different sorts of groups in lots of different environments. When you can do your work instinctively and perhaps others in your field come to you for advice, then you might be ready to think about becoming a trainer.



WHAT MOTIVATES YOU IN YOUR WORK AS A TRAINER?

I love learning new things and I love meeting and spending time with others who are curious about the world and new ideas. I am a student and an educator and I want to help others feel that joy of learning that I know.

I am strongly influenced by the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey and one of my favorite quotations of his is "the most important attitude that can be formed is that of the desire to go on learning"...

...that, and the simple desire to live in a better world than the one we have made so far!

HOW DO YOU PROMOTE YOURSELF AS A TRAINER?

I would say that I have a lot to learn about marketing. Self promotion does not come easily to many who have worked in education and whose intrinsic motivation to 'make a difference' means that they are modest about what they do. Unfortunately we have to operate within the neo-liberal system that we aim to change and to some extent have to 'compete' with other trainers in an increasingly fragmented and individualistic world.

Every trainer has their own personal approach and 'angle' on their work. I think that it is important to communicate that clearly to participants and organizations that you work with so that they can find the most appropriate training approach for themselves.



I made a conscious decision not to brand myself with any of the key words like 'Wild', 'Wood', 'Adventure' etc and stick to using my own name for my website and leaflets etc. There is no pretense of a corporate 'we'; it is just me and the experience that I bring to the course.

I also have decided not to compete with other trainers by offering quick or cheap courses. I am not trying to expand my business, capture market share or get rich but I am going to focus on offering the best quality training that I can. Recently this meant extending my Forest School training course from 8 to 10 days whilst keeping the price the same. I wrote a blog about that here:

<http://richardirvine.co.uk/2016/06/forest-school-training-caveat-emptor/>.

The project "**Meet your Trainer**" was created by Youth and Environment Europe for young people who would like to become trainers in non-formal educational field.



www.yeenet.eu

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