

Alma Forest School

Spring Newsletter - April 2023



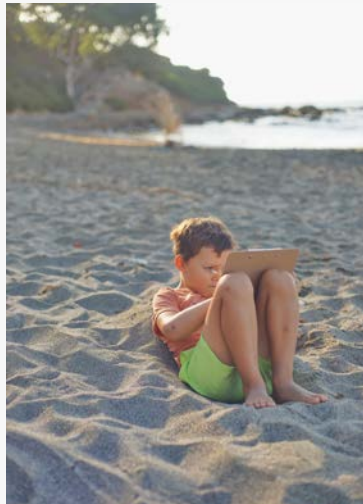
Taking a break during a hike into the hills behind the school.

Back to the Beach

Spring is here and we are excited to spend time at the beach again. Our Primary students are busy checking their snorkeling gear and our new students are looking forward to seeing their first octopus in the wild.



As always, this newsletter is packed with lots of information, not just about Alma Forest but the world of education, parenting and childhood in general.

As the days get longer and children sign up for more and more after-school activities to fill the daylight hours, it's worth reflecting on the things being learned there. If you only read one thing in this newsletter, make it *The Freedom to Make No Progress* on page 6.



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School News



A student about to release a ringed bird.

Tumbabuey Visit

It is always a pleasure when Tumbabuey Grupo de Anillamiento visits for their annual bird ringing session. We are happy to support their conservation work and it is an incredible opportunity for our students to learn about local and migratory birds. Getting up and close to the birds really makes our students appreciate their environment and builds a connection that will last a lifetime. Thank you [Tumbabuey!](#)



Stirring the soap mixture.

Eco-School Update

Our Eco-Committee has been busy finding ways to reduce our reliance on single-use plastics. They developed a cereal bar recipe that is easy to batch make and will avoid parents from buying individually packed bars from stores, they made reusable wax cloth packaging for snacks and sandwiches which were distributed to the whole school and most recently they started making soap using recycled frying oil and scented with our school-grown rosemary, thyme and lavender.

Alma In Numbers

- 65 students
- 23 student nationalities
- 7 staff nationalities
- 1 yurt
- 2 barns
- 3 classrooms
- 10 hectares to roam



Training participants learning all about fire.

Forest School Training

Alma Forest's vision is to ignite a passion for nature among the community and instill the importance of play and children's growth and development in natural settings. That's why we have partnered with Cambium Sustainable to offer an exciting Forest School Leadership training program. Participants from six different countries joined us and completed the 8-day in-person part of their at Alma Forest over the Easter Break.

Participants dove headfirst into outdoor learning approaches, discovered the magic of play, explored the interconnectedness of ecosystems and learned about managing risks. But that's not all - they also got their hands dirty learning practical skills like building shelters, mastering tool use, and lighting fires. Now these aspiring Forest School leaders will compile their portfolios and put their skills to practice.

Thoughts from the Principal

SCHOOL, CHILDHOOD, PARENTING



The Tooth Fairy

The Tooth Fairy is a cherished tradition that has been around for generations, delighting children and parents alike. However, in recent years, there has been a growing trend of children receiving more and more money from the Tooth Fairy for each lost tooth. While this may seem harmless at first, it can actually undermine the purpose of the tradition.

The Tooth Fairy was originally meant to be a fun and magical way to celebrate the milestone of losing a tooth. It was never intended to be about money, but rather about the excitement and wonder of the magical fairy leaving a special surprise in exchange for a lost tooth. It was a way for children to feel like they were part of a magical world, where anything was possible.

However, with children receiving more and more money for their lost teeth, the emphasis is no longer on the magic of the Tooth Fairy, but rather on the monetary reward. Children may start to view losing a tooth as just another way to make some quick cash, rather than a special milestone in their development. This culminates in morning circle discussions where children compare their Tooth Fairy takings and where some will inevitably feel underappreciated because they did not get 20 Euros for their last tooth.

So, let's remind children that the Tooth Fairy is not just about money, but about the magic and wonder of childhood. It's about celebrating milestones and creating memories that will last a lifetime. Escalating the amount of money they find under the pillow adds nothing to the tradition and only furthers a focus on competitive material gain. Of course, childhood can be a magical time entirely without a tooth fairy as well.

Unconditional Love

A scenario you will no doubt be familiar with, your child comes home from school and starts recounting an upsetting moment that occurred in school. They speak of events that clearly pit another as the perpetrator and themselves as the hapless victim. Of course, you listen with the knowledge that every story has two sides and that there might be more to this than is being revealed to you.

Nonetheless, you are compelled to take action. This might be a conversation with the parent of the other child, notifying the teacher, or pressing the child to reveal more details and asking them what they want you to do.

This moment can also be reframed as the child simply seeking an affirmation of unconditional love and positive regard. Their story is overly simplistic because they just want you to listen and show them some love, not have a discussion about the complexity of social interactions. Maybe they just want to voice their pain and hear,

"I hear you, that must have felt horrible, I love you!"

More often than not, the hard work of solving a conflict and dealing with the complexities of a situation has already been done in school. Of course, sometimes children do come with a request for help when a situation in school seems overwhelming, but the hard work of parenting is judging when that is the case.



School News - Escuela Bosque

Orchidarium Visit

The Escuela Bosque's visit to the orchidarium was truly fantastic! The children were captivated by the vibrant colors and diverse shapes of the beautiful orchids. The hands-on learning experience sparked their curiosity about nature and helped them understand the importance of plant conservation. The trip fostered a sense of wonder and appreciation for the world around them, making it an unforgettable educational adventure. Much of this wonder came from the captivating tour guide who shared his fascination with our students.



Toolboxes

Our older Escuela Bosque group recently embarked on an exciting hands-on project, creating their own wooden toolboxes. The children developed essential skills like measuring, cutting, and assembling. The sense of accomplishment they felt upon completing their toolboxes was palpable, boosting their confidence and fostering a sense of independence. This creative endeavor nurtured their problem-solving abilities and instilled pride in their craftsmanship.



Inventions & Inventors and Minibeasts

The Escuela Bosque recently delved into two engaging topics chosen by the students: inventions and inventors, as well as minibeasts. The children enthusiastically explored the world of innovative creations, learning about famous inventors and their groundbreaking discoveries. This sparked their curiosity and inspired them to imagine their own inventions, fostering their creativity and critical thinking skills. Simultaneously, the kids embarked on a captivating journey into the realm of minibeasts, investigating various insects and small creatures. This hands-on exploration allowed them to appreciate the fascinating diversity of life and understand the important role these tiny organisms play in our ecosystem.



Celebrating Spring with Music

Led by Bea, the Escuela Bosque enthusiastically welcomed spring with a delightful celebration filled with songs and music exploration. The children joyfully performed tunes that captured the essence of the season, while discovering a wide array of instruments at their music station. From tambourines to xylophones, the kids eagerly experimented with different sounds, fostering their creativity and teamwork. This lively event not only nurtured their musical talents but also helped them appreciate the beauty of spring's arrival.

School News - Primary

Past Civilizations Exploration

We recently came to the end of our Animals Exploration which focused on investigating the concepts of Connection and Change. Our students came together to brainstorm ideas for the next Exploration and two ideas were prominent in their suggestions. It came down to a vote on History or the Human Body, with History gaining an almost unanimous vote. To further narrow the focus, students decided on comparing past civilizations in different places rather than investigating one location throughout time.

For the Exploration topic Past Civilizations, we will try to broaden our students' horizons by investing lesser-known civilizations and by avoiding a Eurocentric view of History. Our conceptual focus will be on Function and Form.

Titan 1

Students undertook an ambitious project, constructing their own wooden boat named Titan 1. Despite facing a steep learning curve, they persevered, gaining valuable skills and experience. Encouraged by their accomplishments and lessons learned, the young boat builders now eagerly plan to build an improved version, Titan 2, showcasing their determination and growth.



Researching DIY boat designs.



Testing the boat on the pool.

School Sleepover

We recently had another community-building sleepover in the classrooms, complete with delicious s'mores and fun activities. Students and teachers bonded over cozy campfire stories, laughter, and games, forging stronger connections. This unique experience not only nurtured a sense of belonging and unity but also created lasting memories. These sleepovers always feature when children reflect on their favourite moments of the year.



Getting ready for bed with some reading.

Hike into the Hills

Our primary school students eagerly embarked on a 10k hike into the picturesque hills behind our school, taking advantage of a glorious spring day. Surrounded by nature's beauty, they enjoyed the physical challenge and camaraderie while exploring the scenic landscape. Impressively, nobody complained, and their enthusiasm remained high throughout the journey. This outdoor adventure which involved exploring ruins and climbing new trees, left the students eager and ready for more exhilarating experiences.



On top of the hill behind the school.

Curriculum Explained

Self-Directed Learning

Learning becomes significantly more meaningful and impactful when it occurs through activities and projects that children freely select. When given the autonomy to manage their own time and establish their objectives, children demonstrate remarkable levels of engagement and enthusiasm. They develop essential life skills, such as overcoming challenges, problem-solving, and assuming complete responsibility for the results of their actions. This understanding underpins the approach at Alma Forest, where we allocate substantial time to self-directed projects and activities. As a crucial component of our curriculum, self-directed learning comprises one of the three strands that guide our students' educational journey.

The self-directed approach at Alma Forest varies in implementation depending on the age of the children and the time of year. In the Escuela Bosque, catering to children aged 3-6, the majority of the day is spent allowing them to choose activities to participate in, including unstructured free play. This opportunity fosters the development of robust social skills and helps them uncover their passions and motivations as learners, creating a strong foundation for their future educational experiences.

As children transition into the primary school, self-directed learning evolves into Personal Project time, during which students design, manage, and execute their own projects. Teachers take on an advisory role, offering guidance and assistance to students as they acquire new skills necessary for project completion. When a project reaches its conclusion, or is ultimately abandoned, students present their work to the entire class. These presentations are always a highlight, as they showcase the creativity, perseverance, and growth experienced by the students throughout their self-directed learning journey.

[For some examples of past projects, have a look at our Curriculum Outline here.](#)



Students finding the best way up a new tree.

Managing Risk vs. Avoiding Risk

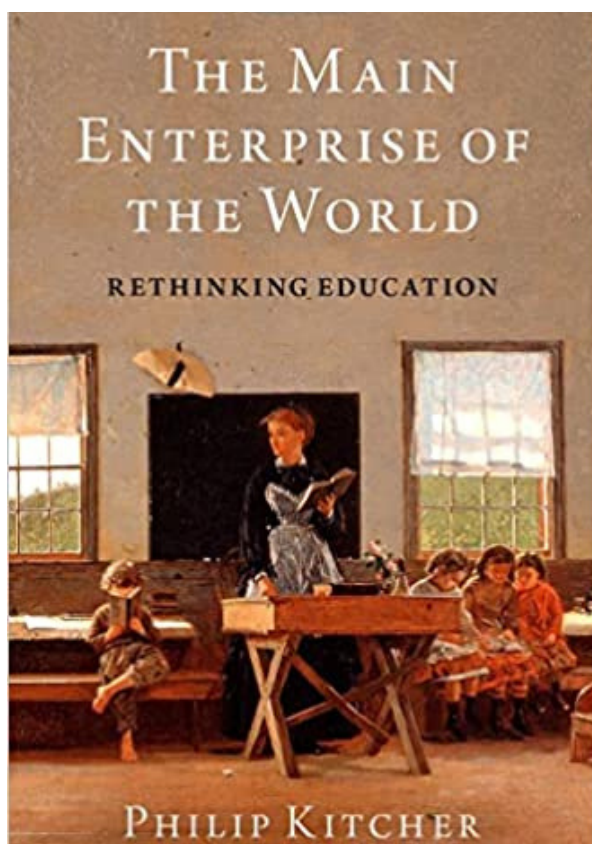
At Alma Forest, we provide a safe space for children to experience risky situations while making sure they have the skills and knowledge to make informed decisions about the risks they take. This is true when it comes to physical risks such as climbing trees and emotional risks such as solving peer conflicts.

Teaching children to manage risk, rather than avoiding it, fosters resilience, self-reliance, and confidence. Equipping children with the ability to navigate uncertainty and make informed decisions is essential in today's rapidly changing world. Managing risk helps children develop problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and self-esteem as they learn to handle difficult situations independently.

Encouraging calculated risks promotes a growth mindset, emotional resilience, and social skills. Children learn to cope with setbacks, disappointment, and failure, while also developing cooperation and communication abilities through collaborative experiences. By incorporating risk management into their education, children foster independence and decision-making skills, preparing them for future challenges.

The World of Education

IDEAS AND INSPIRATION



The Main Enterprise of the World - Part 1

In this sweeping new contribution to the field of Philosophy of Education, Kitcher not only outlines the history of thought in this field but makes a bold proposal as to what the future of education should look like. He suggests that we need to start over and think about the important questions Socrates asked: 'How should I live?' and 'How should we live together?' This means changing the usual focus on individual freedom and considering how helping others and the community leads to personal fulfillment. Three main goals for education come from this: being self-sufficient, being a good citizen, and living a fulfilling life. For Kitcher, all of these should be taught within a more cooperative and inclusive vision of democracy akin to that envisioned by Dewey.

Education should encourage working together and making decisions as a group from a young age. It should also help develop our understanding of other people's views. Kitcher's idea that other-directedness can lead to fulfillment is not presented as natural or moral law but as a conscious choice. We can make other-directedness a central value in our educational institutions.

This might ring true to those in support of and familiar with Alma Forest but it represents a fundamental shift from the status quo of education around the world where individual success is valued over everything else.

This is even true when looking at endeavours that aim to help others. Big gestures of help and support are celebrated while the everyday mundane acts of kindness are overlooked. This often leads individuals to feel helpless when it comes to improving the lives of others if they can't create a foundation or have millions to spare. Kitcher argues that the goal should not be to create a generation of altruists but of humans who can recognize small ways to improve the lives of others and gain fulfillment from doing so.

He also takes aim at our lack of 'deep' democratic structures in modern societies. Just being able to cast a vote in an election is shallow democracy vulnerable to manipulation and fractioning as we see it now. He suggests that education plays an important role in developing deep democratic structures based on access to information, open debate, critical thinking and empathy.

You can read Part 2 of this summary in the next newsletter. There you will find out how all this might look in practice. If you can't wait, buy the book.

The Freedom to Make No Progress

Naomi Fisher argues that assessment systems in extracurricular activities like ballet, music, and drama often prioritize performance over enjoyment for children. They learn to seek external validation through certificates and grades, believing progress is expected and starting 'late' means falling behind. In contrast, adult learners are free from these pressures and can pursue activities for sheer pleasure. Research suggests external motivators can damage intrinsic motivation, leading children to lose interest in activities due to excessive assessment and competition. By constantly emphasizing approval and progress, we risk inhibiting children's ability to pursue activities for enjoyment. It's crucial to give children a break and let them explore their passions for fun. Why do we let adults engage in activities for fun while we make things competitive for children?

[Read the full article by Naomi Fisher here.](#)

The World of Education cont.

IDEAS AND INSPIRATION

Bullying - too narrow a lense

"To change kids' behavior, we 1st need to normalize social churn, demystify popularity, operationalize kindness, help them assume good intent, & ID when & why they're mean." - Phyllis Fagell

The term "bullying" is frequently used to categorize various conflict situations in schools. However, this oversimplification can overlook the intricate social dynamics underlying each situation, ultimately limiting the potential for a resolution that steers clear of labeling participants in ways that only serve to reinforce animosities.

For a more detailed discussion, please read this interview with Phyllis Fagell, which, although focused on middle school aged children, raises valuable points for educators and parents alike.

['Why Bullying Is Too Narrow a Lens for Addressing Conflict in Middle School'](#)



Restorative Approaches to Conflict Resolution

For a quick introduction to what restorative conflict resolution is, [watch this video](#). At Alma Forest, we believe that conflict resolution should not be based on punishment, revenge or labeling individuals. This approach would lead to an environment that relies on adults policing the school and fear being used to discourage negative behaviour, a situation more akin to a prison yard than a school. Instead, we seek to resolve conflict with a forward-looking approach that focuses on what happens next rather than placing importance on any given event.

[Restorative Resources](#) has [put together a Parent Handbook](#) with some introductory information and reflective questions so that parents can begin to incorporate restorative approaches at home.



Playing with the new puppy at school.

What Is Play? How Children Define It

"The children's assumption, apparently, is that if an adult is present the adult is probably taking charge, so it isn't play; and if no adult is present but two or more children are doing something together it is very likely play, because that's what children do when they are together with no adult." - [read the full article here](#)

At Alma Forest, we strive to challenge the assumption that adults cannot be part of the imaginative play worlds of our students. We hope to create an environment where the adults are welcomed into these realms. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the impact an adult's presence may have on a child's perception of play and their sense of freedom within it.

This understanding calls for a more conscious effort on our part to step back and allow children to engage in play without constant supervision and intervention. By doing so, we can foster a sense of autonomy, creativity, and independence in our students, allowing them to explore, learn, and grow through their own self-guided experiences. Finding the right balance between being involved and providing space for unstructured play is essential in nurturing well-rounded, confident individuals.

Student & Staff Interviews

Student Interview: Isabella

Isabella began her journey at Alma Forest in 2020. She started in the Escuela Bosque and is now in Grade 2. Isabella also has older and younger siblings in the school.



Enjoying painting galaxies with friends.

What is your favourite place in the school?

My favourite place is the outside play area because there is lots of space and we play games like Fireball.

What games do you play during break times?

We play Fireball, Tag, Huggy Wuggy Hide & Seek Tag, and Horses but my favourite is Fireball.

What would you say to a child that is thinking about joining Alma Forest? What should they know?

They should know that this is the best school and they should be prepared for lots of outdoor adventures.

What is something that you enjoyed learning about?

I enjoyed learning about the Iberian lynx and how it is endangered and I also liked learning about commensalism, mutualism and parasitism.

What is one personal project that you are proud of?

I am most proud of the dresses that I made because I learned how to use a sewing machine and I got to explore the different types of fabrics and designs.

Did anything fun recently happen?

A fun thing was the school sleepover and having s'mores with my friends. Catching and releasing the birds was also an exciting thing.



Celebrating at the end of a play performance for younger students.

What is the best part of being a student at Alma Forest?

It's having the freedom to be outside and being part of choosing our Explorations. I also love choosing our Personal Projects.

Anything else you want to add?

You get to make new friends from all around the world that come to this school.

Student & Staff Interviews

Staff Interview: Clare

Clare is part of the Escuela Bosque team and works with children aged 3-6. Before joining Alma Forest, Clare ran her own woodwork sessions for children and worked at a Montessori school in Estepona.



Fun fact about you.

Being from Southampton and having a family tree that goes back generations there, I have been told that I have relatives who worked aboard the Titanic. I need to dive deeper into this!

How did you come to be an educator?

I'd worked mostly for a property developer in Southampton, and as a PA in London before I moved to Spain. It wasn't until I had Woody that I thought 'Wow! These little people are just brilliant!' And so, changed my professional direction. I studied Early Years and worked as a teaching assistant in a traditional school while I gained my diploma. But Something just didn't seem right to me; too many limits, no nature, too much crying and not enough laughing. Doing some research, I found out about Forest School. So, along with Woody, I went to volunteer in Denmark. Here Forest School is just how all preschools are, not a special alternative approach. The children could be children, play, take risks...it was great! Using tools was a part of the pedagogy, so on my return I attended Woodwork in the Early Years Training. I am very passionate about this as being one of the best child-initiated development mediums.

Is there anything you had to unlearn at Alma Forest?

My Montessori training taught me to move slowly, shake hands and be an observer. Although there is still a time and a place for this, it is also good to play games, have fun, and children really like to be hung upside down!

What would you like to be better at?

So many things! Languages, Sport, Music are the obvious ones...But I would really like to be better at identifying mushrooms. My dad is an avid fungi hunter and is so knowledgeable about them! Whenever I can travel back, we spend days in the New Forest with his Cockapoo foraging. This last season we found an Octopus Stinkhorn, a mushroom that my dad informed me he hadn't seen for 40 years.

Share a little anecdote of life at Alma Forest with us.

I really like to let the children know how I admire their ability to speak languages (something I have never applied myself to, the way I should have). One morning I was learning some Dutch from a student, me and this child hug a lot, so they taught me how to say hug..."knuffel!" Now, the 'Upside down knuffel' is a well-known morning ritual throughout the group.

What is your favourite way to spend time with children?

Both woodwork and gardening have so many more layers of learning to them than the practical life skills involved. Both activities translate so well in any language, so for students where English is an additional language, it's a great way to communicate and embed some action words.

Gardening with children can incorporate math's and literacy into their day; counting and measuring pea pods for example, putting harvests in size order to discuss length, making signs for the garden and so much more. With woodwork, you can follow the child's own interests, support their physical development and enrich their vocabulary with new language. I shouldn't forget Beach School though! That is magic!



Noteworthy

Skimming rocks - a Science

"While aficionados of the pursuit favour thin, flat stones for long-distance skimming, the researchers' mathematical model reveals that heavier, potato-shaped stones can achieve more dramatic results, which blast the rock into the air."

We shall try out this theory now that we will be spending more time at the beach on by the river again. Read the full article below.

[Potato-shaped stones are better for skimming, say experts](#)













Finding the perfect rocks to skip on the Guadiaro.

A collection of Children's Games

We hope that this website will continue to expand its collection of games from around the world. It's certainly worth sharing these with children although maybe skip the one that involves pulling out grasshoppers' legs, but even that game would be a good basis for discussing animal rights.

We will certainly introduce some of these games at the school. We are now on a mission to find some rules for Kisolo.

[Follow this link to view the collection.](#)

 <p>Children's Game #12: Musical Chairs Davaqa, Mexico, 2012; 5:05 min</p>	 <p>Children's Game #11: Wolf and Lamb Yamgan, Afghanistan, 2011; 3:01 min</p>	 <p>Children's Game #10: Papatote Balkh, Afghanistan, 2011; 4:13 min</p>	 <p>Children's Game #9: Saltamontes Santo Acha, Venezuela, 2011; 6:10 min</p>	 <p>Children's Game #8: Marbles Amman, Jordan, 2010; 2:37 min</p>
 <p>Children's Game #7: Stick and Wheels Bamiyan, Afghanistan, 2010; 5:22 min</p>	 <p>Children's Game #6: Sandcastles Kocikhe-Le-Zoete, Belgium, 2009; 6:04 min</p>	 <p>Children's Game #5: Revolver Baja California, Mexico, 2009; 2:49 min</p>	 <p>Children's Game #4: Elastic Paris, France, 2009; 7:58 min</p>	 <p>Children's Game #3: Coins Mexico City, Mexico, 2008; 2:39 min</p>

Books on our Horizon



The story of a troubled boy who befriends a stray dog, loses him, and then embarks on a challenging journey to reunite, may seem like the premise of a heartwarming novel. However, this tale is more intense than one might anticipate. By presenting the dog's perspective and conversations among animals, the story illustrates how cruelty can erode self-esteem through various characters such as a sadistic spider, a teacher who humiliates the least privileged student, and a conniving cat. The narrative also depicts the suffering of a hunted fox and the dreadful reality of a factory producing pet food from lost animals. This potent and captivating story emphasizes the importance of resisting the narratives others impose on you and cherishing the significant individuals in your life.

It must be said that this is a book best read together so that upsetting situations can be talked through and difficult moments lived through in company. It's certainly packed with lots of big ideas to talk about.

Photo Roundup



Measuring the harvest and a new puppy at school.



Celebrating the Cadiz carnival with self-made costumes.



Making book bags and Venus flytraps.



Tasting a range of spices and herbs from India.



Water snake discovery while pond dipping.



Releasing tadpoles into the Escuela Bosque pond.



A music lesson in the Spring sunshine.



I am convinced that most people do not grow up. We marry and dare to have children and call that growing up. I think what we do is mostly grow old.

- Maya Angelou