Cultivating Future Educators: **Project Learning Tree Takes Root in Higher Education**

By: Ashley Smith



In 2026, Project Learning Tree marks five decades of empowering educators and students through hands-on learning about forests and sustainability. Since 1980, PLT has been a cornerstone of the Alabama Forestry Foundation's education efforts, offering curriculum, professional development, and a supportive network to help educators deepen their understanding of Alabama's forest industry.





In PLT training at colleges and universities, college students, who will one day lead their own classrooms, experience PLT's hands-on, fun lessons. With activities and lessons tailored for specific grade levels and education standards, a variety of forestry topics, and formal or non-formal teaching situations, PLT teaches participants HOW to think, not WHAT to think about important environmental issues. With PLT lessons, learners transition from unawareness to awareness, understanding to acceptance.



The facilitators who lead college-level PLT workshops realize the impact for student teachers. Alabama Forestry Foundation supporters believe the work matters. Seeing future teachers discover Alabama's forests and embrace PLT's curriculum is inspiring. The true reward comes when they act and bring PLT lessons to life in their own classrooms.

One example of PLT's impact on future educators comes from Auburn University. Annie Lusk, Auburn Early Childhood Education major, participated in a PLT training in her College of Education Math and Science class. During the training, she found activities to integrate into her early childhood student teaching.

"I used the PLT Adopt a Tree activity with my students," Annie later shared. **"They absolutely LOVED it! Thank you for introducing Project Learning Tree to my class!"**

Her professor Lindsay Griffies affirms Project Learning Tree has been a great addition to their math and science class. **"The student teachers really enjoy being outside and participating in hands-on activities,"** she said. **"I firmly believe we learn by doing, and what better way than to be outside in nature! PLT provides a wonderful resource with activities that can be done with children of all ages, and they are all aligned with state standards."**

Alabama Forestry Foundation is committed to inspiring educators and equipping them with tools to teach future generations about forests and sustainability. You can help amplify this impact. Whether offering time as a volunteer, sharing expertise to support PLT workshops, or contributing resources to expand training opportunities, your involvement makes a difference. Help prepare tomorrow's educators with forest-based learning.

To get involved or bring PLT training to your favorite college or university, contact Jaquie Parker, Alabama PLT Coordinator, at plt@alaforestry.org.

