

# **Culturing the fruits of the forest: Realising the multifunctional potential of space and place in the context of woodland and/or Forest Schools**

## **Abstract**

This paper seeks to explore the potential of woodland as a milieu for Outdoor and Environmental Learning (OEL) in the context of phenomenal rise of Forest Schools (FS) in the United Kingdom. Whilst broadly supportive of these developments, the paper adopts a critical stance in arguing that the notion of the ‘forest’ as a literal and metaphoric wild and expansive space of risk, excitement, freedom, exploration and intimate contact with nature which underpins the original FS concept seems to be giving way to a diluted sense of controlled spaces and activities for curriculum enrichment, a process referred to as ‘scolonisation’. Furthermore, the paper considers FS in relation to two ‘axes’: ‘learning milieu’ and ‘practitioners’, arguing that a spectrum exists from, on the one hand, relatively ‘deforested’ to substantially wooded learning contexts; and, on the other, novice through to expert practitioners. The paper argues that the most efficacious woodland-oriented Outdoor Learning will take place in woodland environments under the facilitation of ‘silvanatives’ – those with substantial practical and pedagogical knowledge about learning in woodland contexts. However, this ideal potential is under-realised when the learning context is relatively ‘deforested’, or practitioners are relatively ‘silvanaïve’ or superficially trained, trends that are seemingly increasingly characterising the movement as it becomes ‘scaled-up’.

## **Introduction:**

This paper seeks to explore the potential of woodland as a milieu for Outdoor and Environmental Learning (OEL) in the context of the phenomenal rise of Forest Schools (FS) in the United Kingdom. In its ideal formulation, FS philosophy, ethos and practice can be seen as being “nested within wider social movements surrounding ‘free-range childhoods’; natural play, environmentalism, land rights, woodland culture, and learner-centred education” (Cree & McCree, 2013, p. 61). However, following Leather (2018), this paper argues that the increasingly ‘mainstream’ and ‘commodified’ culture within which FS is being developed and disseminated can lead to a diminution of the potential of forest schooling, and a decoupling from these broad social movements. Consequently, this paper adopts a critical but qualifiedly supportive position in which FS is acknowledged and celebrated as a welcome

initiative and substantial contributor to the practice of outdoor and environmental learning (OEL) in the UK and further afield; whilst at the same time seeking to guard against missed opportunities, as identified by Maynard & Waters (2007) in the specific context of woodland settings. In particular, this paper explores issues around FS through the lenses of space, place and culture, and the potential – realised or otherwise – for this particular environmental setting to contribute to environmental ‘goods,’ including educational.

This paper argues that there exists a spectrum of possibilities along a FS continuum from relatively ‘ideal’ or ‘best practice,’ through ‘good’ to relatively ‘compromised’ or ‘in need of improvement,’ but that all instances are worthy of acceptance into the fold. To tease out these differences a typological model comprising two dimensions – people and place - is presented below. In this sense, this paper provides a normatively descriptive tool for identifying particular instances of FS in relation to this typology.

This recognition that all is not equal is important since, as noted by Leather (2018), “the rapid development of Forest Schools in the UK has seen pragmatic concerns overtake conceptual understanding” (p. 2). Thus, undertaking FS training and achieving certification does not require a deep, critical and reflexive engagement with relevant pedagogy in OEL generally, and woodland contexts specifically. This situation, whilst greatly increasing the accessibility and ‘scaling up’ of FS practice, does not facilitate the type of critically reflective practice that is required to realistically evaluate the type of provision being offered, and subsequently make improvements. Along with Leather, I am concerned that the apparent “market dominance of the Forest School brand narrows the opportunities for outdoor education in forest and woodland” (p. 6) in that the ‘less-than-ideal’ varieties or what might be called ‘FS-light’ are increasingly becoming the prevalent model.

This is not to say that some, indeed many, instances of FS are wholly commensurate with the broad social movements identified above. However, there will be increasing instances where the FS ‘brand’ represents an inferior product through no fault of the practitioners. This, then, requires critically reflective and aware woodland pedagogues, capable of making these crucial judgements and improvements. But I would argue that it is more than this; there is a prevailing ignorance within UK culture, and by extension amongst those undertaking to practice FS, of the full range of ‘goods and services’ that woodlands provide – both tangible and intangible (see below). Without such an appreciation, the full potential of using woodlands is lessened as certain affordances are overlooked. This, then, represents a habitat-specific instance of “environmental generational amnesia” (Kahn Jr., 2002).

## **Towards a typology**

As outlined above, this paper seeks to explore how best to realise the potential of learning in relation to trees and woods in the dual sense of ‘recognising’ and ‘bringing to fruition,’ where the potential is firmly aligned to the normative aspirations of the broader social movements within which Cree and McCree (2013) locate FS. This paper argues that there are two key dimensions to consider when evaluating efficacy: the place and the people (at individual or collective levels). On the one hand, the place or space of learning is important in terms of affording a range of ‘ecosystem cultural goods’ (see below). This is significant since the range of settings within which FS is nominally practised is widening, and increasingly covers a spectrum from fully wooded areas in relatively natural settings as originally envisaged by seminal FS workers, to a contrived nature-space, perhaps devoid of trees, within a school’s grounds. Whilst acknowledging the desirability of broadening the range of contexts within which FS is practised, this paper argues that it is towards the woodland end of this spectrum that the potential is greatest. This claim is perhaps self-evident. However, the paper draws on recent discussions of ‘ecosystem cultural services’ and environmental psychology, particularly in relation to woodland, to bolster it.

On the other hand, it is not enough that the environment affords a great range of functions if the practitioners, facilitators or mentors themselves are not fully aware of the opportunities and how to take advantage of them. Consequently, the second key dimension is the person or people who facilitate. This has implications for the manner in which woodland educators and/or FS practitioners are trained, since such comprehensive and nuanced woodland knowledge is unlikely to be apparent amongst what Leather (2018, p. XX) calls “outdoor immigrants” (cf ‘outdoor natives’), such as mainstream teachers who are increasingly being inducted as FS-practitioners at a relatively basic level. Here the notion of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK; Shulman, 1987) is pertinent since a practitioner will require both content knowledge (which might include ecological, practical but also cultural knowledge about the value of woodland) *and* pedagogical knowledge and skills (how best to ‘convey’ this to others in an outdoor context). The PCK required of OEL in a woodland, or indeed any outdoor environment, will not be achieved through training for formal classroom settings. Once again, there will be a spectrum of positions identifiable, from relatively woodland/outdoor pedagogically wise to relatively naïve practitioners (Leather’s natives and immigrants respectively), with a self-evident preference in this paper towards better informed

and experienced practitioners. In the context of the current paper, the terms *silvanative* and *silvanaive* (from the Latin *silvan* meaning related to woodland) are proffered to characterise someone exhibiting the higher (native) and lower (immigrant) levels of PCK.

Figure one attempts to summarise these dimensions schematically, with the y-axis representing the personal or people dimension, and the x-axis that of place. With the y-axis, as one moves from the bottom, the level of woodland-specific PCK increases from relative *silvanaive* towards *silvanative*. What might constitute the ‘content’ that characterise a *silvanative* is further explored later in this paper. With regard to the x axis, there exists a spectrum from relatively contrived, deforested (devoid of trees) spaces such as might be encountered in a designed area within the school grounds of an urban school; towards the ideal type of natural woodland proper. Woodland, and indeed all environments, should be seen as complex ‘social-ecological systems’. However, it is possible to discern a spectrum from relatively natural, ecological or spontaneous and self-arising (Bonnet, 2004a, 2004b) versus humanly designed or manufactured (such as a localised shrubbery, hedge or individual trees, or plantation).

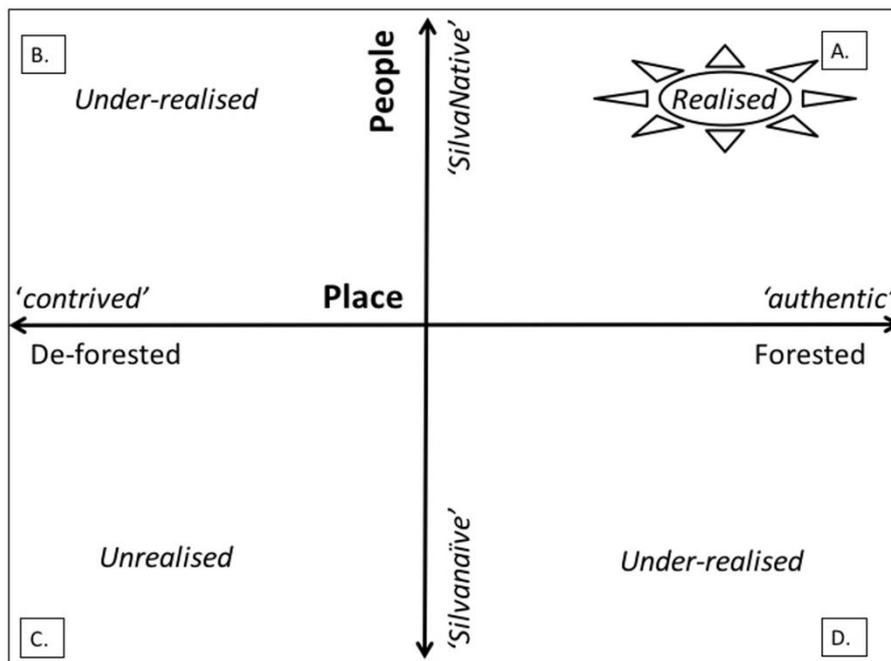


Figure 1. Two dimensions of realising the potential of OEL

This then generates a schema with four types – A, B, C and D. The ideal type - where the opportunities for woodland OEL are fully realised - occupy segment A, where the environmental setting is natural woodland; and the people are *silvanative*. Conversely, segment C represents a situation where the potential remains unrealised due to a combination

of an impoverished, unwooded or deforested place or space, and a limited PCK amongst the silvanaïve people attempting to facilitate learning. This represents the situation which might prevail in an urban school-setting with limited green space and token shrubs being overseen by a relatively under-trained FS practitioner. Segment B represents a position where the PCK of practitioners is high and able to address to an extent the shortcomings of the setting, so the potential is partially or under-realised. Similarly, segment D represents a situation where the environmental setting is rich (i.e. natural woodland) but the practitioners lack the PCK to take full advantage. Whilst this schema has been developed here with woodland in mind, it is hoped that the general principles should be transferable to other environmental settings and habitats (such as riverine, coastal, heathland and moorland, montane etc.).

### **Space, Place and Wild Wood?**

Returning specifically to woodland, according to OBrien and Murray (2006, p. 4) there are five key features of FS that mark it out from other types of OEL. Their first defining criterion seems to be that forest schools should be associated with woodland, and that location in a forest is a defining characteristic, i.e. FS should be associated with woodland. In the UK this term is defined as “land with trees where the mature trees would cover more than 20% by area” (Agbenyega, Burgess, Cook, & Morris, 2009, p. 551). This means many contrived spaces (such as parks) and most school-grounds would not qualify. This is perhaps acknowledged by the authors who, later in their report, imply that merely being in “a natural setting that is different and distinct from the classroom” (OBrien & Murray, 2006, p. 39) is a sufficient qualification for a FS. This seemingly obviates the need for woodland, or indeed, trees, making the F in FS neither necessary nor sufficient. This flexibility or ambiguity allows for the FS concept to be operationalised in a host of non-wooded settings, opening up the possibility for other types Learning in the Natural Environment (LINE) contexts, including *within* a schools grounds. Once again, this is in many respects laudable, opening as it does the potential for FS-style opportunities to all including those not in close proximity to a wooded area. However, this deforestation has unexamined consequences which this paper seeks to highlight.

Another unexplored assumption presented in this report is also worth critical examination. The authors further exemplify how FS is distinguishable from other forms of OEL in terms of “the use of a woodland (and *therefore wild* [emphasis added]) setting” (OBrien & Murray, 2006, p. 6). This equating of woodland with wildness is interesting. Of

course, wild and wildness are themselves relative and slippery terms, with no true instance of pristine wilderness existing within the UK, or perhaps anywhere in the world. But what is implied is a preference towards the more natural authentic end of the spectrum envisaged in Figure 1. This further seems to imply that the more contrived nature-spaces specifically created within school-grounds to enact FS, even if trees are present, are not wholly appropriate in terms of this criterion. Why wildness is preferable is not properly explored, but it seems to draw on the Rousseauian tradition that recognises a profound relationship between innate self-arising characteristics of children and nature (Doyle & Smith, 2007; Rousseau, 1991).

Whilst notions such as ‘the Noble Savage’ and an ‘Edenic’ innocent state of nature associated with childhood are problematic, they do provide some philosophical basis for child-centred, self-directed engagement in the natural world as a key pedagogical principle in much OEL, and the principles of the free-choice and play espoused by FS (OBrien & Murray, 2006). This issue of the degree of wildness vis-à-vis control or discipline in relation to the learning space seems a crucial one, and a further reason for making the distinction between types of setting in Figure 1. Interestingly, these pedagogical considerations have deeper cultural echoes which reflect the discussion to follow. Thus, “the relationship between humans and nature has its origins in the relationship between early humans and the forests that sheltered (and threatened) them”; hence, “civilisation became the antithesis of forests” (Tabbush, 2010, pp. 10-11). Similarly, “in European culture, the word ‘savage’ was derived from *silva* meaning a wood” (Laird, 1999, p. 351).

Another associated concern is the degree of standardisation and commodification of the learning space associated with FS, even in relatively authentic contexts. Whilst each site is unique, they are likely to have standard features (such as fire hearth, mud kitchen, etc.) and activities (the ubiquitous fire-lighting and marshmallow cooking), and/or emphasis on fun and ‘edutainment’. This is further reflected in the rise of privately run income generating businesses offering FS as children’s parties. Standardised training and certification, whilst providing important quality control and health and safety safeguards, can reduce innovation and diversity in FS practice specifically, and the field generally as ‘FS’ has seemingly become accepted as *the* way to do OEL amongst decision makers (Leather, 2018). There then comes the danger that many FS sites become “non-places” (Augé, 1995): generic contexts with the requisite and ubiquitous features and activities which are ‘performed’ with limited conceptual understanding of why (Leather, 2018); or in a perfunctory and superficial manner which does not allow true learning to take place. This is not to say that these elements

and activities are not key ingredients but the danger is that one FS site is superficially no different from the rest and driven by expediency. There needs to be a more nuanced and place-responsive attitude (see e.g. Beames & Brown, 2016; Wattchow & Brown, 2011). Here Tuan's (1977) deceptively simple formula that: "*Space + Meaning* [whether derived at the individual or cultural level] = *Place*" is important in highlighting how generic spaces (including woodland) only become particular woodland places – toponymically named and owned (in the non-materialistic sense of having 'meaning' whether at a personal or collective level) through personal and collective engagements over time. The space then becomes inscribed as a place with narrative and symbolic meaning through biographical and social lived experiences and collective associations. This is why the key principle espoused by FS of "regular contact ... over a significant period of time" (O'Brien & Murray, 2006, p. 6) is so crucial, but is sadly not enacted to an adequate degree in some FS programmes. The particular personal and cultural attributes of woodland compared to other spaces for accruing personal and cultural meanings are further explored below.

### **Lessons from ecopsychology and ecophenomenology**

Whilst it is beyond the scope of the current paper to explore the emerging trans-disciplinary approaches such as environmental psychology (Bonnes & Secchiaroli, 1995; Cassidy, 1997; S. Kaplan & Kaplan, 2009), ecopsychology (Fisher, 2002; Roszak, 2001) and ecophenomenology (Brown & Toadvine, 2003; Seamon & Mugerauer, 2000) in any great depth, they provide important considerations of the way in which people interact with trees and woodland at the intuitive and prereflective levels. Working in the late nineteenth century, the psychologist Quantz proposed a theory of "human-attachment to trees" which he termed "dendro-psychoses" where the term psychoses was used in the original sense of "state of mind" rather than the contemporary usage of mental disorder (see Sommer, 2001). This represented an 'evolutionary' or biological theory that relates quite closely to more contemporary thinking such as the biophilia theory of Wilson (1984) and Kellert (2002). Kaplan and Kaplan (1989, p. XX) have proposed the "information-habitat" theory of environmental preference and identify the following attributes as particularly "attractive" to people through adaptive evolution: coherence, complexity, legibility and mystery. These are characteristics that are easily associated with woodland settings, more so than unwooded and/or contrived ones.

From a more ecophenomenological perspective, the particular attributes of trees as organisms which are, relative to humans (and particularly children), large, long-lived and largely 'other' yet still relatable, partly account for the deep affinity that people feel towards them. When scaled up to a woodland, other unique characteristics come into play such as the endarkening canopy (which can invoke a frisson of fear and/or excitement), the transitions between open (glade) and enclosed (copse, canopy, etc.) spaces, the associated mottling effect of light and dark, the presence of bird song, found objects and found creatures all add up to a heady mixture of sensations to excite the whole being. Echoing significant life experience research (Chawla, 1999; Tanner, 1980), Church et al. note that,

childhood experiences of unstructured play with minimal adult supervision in woodland areas significantly influenced the perception of woodlands in adult life and the seeking out of outdoor spaces when stressed ... [whereas] infrequent woodland or greenspace experiences as a child correlates with a lower frequency of visits during adulthood. (Church, Burgess, & Ravenscroft, 2011, p. 663)

The implications are fairly clear – positive experiences in woodland (proper) in childhood are important for appreciating woodland specifically, and nature generally, in adulthood; and without such experiences people run the risk of “nature deficit disorder” (Louv, 2005), and society that of ‘environmental generational amnesia’. This is the central thesis behind Louv’s (2005) aptly titled, *Last Child in the Woods*. As Schroeder suggests,

It is a short step to consider the ecospiritual potential of trees and woods since contact with trees, forests and other natural environments can draw us into a closer awareness of a hidden, unconscious world that lies within ourselves .... The physical environment becomes infused with feelings, images and values. A forest experience in this way is a magical place. There is a sense of enchantment, and everything is filled with meaning. (Schroeder, 1996, pp. 298 & 300)

Woodlands can invoke feelings of awe due to the humbling effect of encounters with large individual trees and of being enclosed by a canopy like a vast cathedral. A powerful example of the ecospiritual potential of trees through FS is provided through an anecdote recounted by Jon Cree about his conversation with a four year old boy who was attracted to a particular

tree which he had called his “Be Tree” where “I can be me ... and I can just feel really ‘comfy’ and I can feel the whole world” (Cree, as cited in Forest School Association, 2017).

### **Ecosystem Cultural Services of Woodland and Forest**

The foregoing discussion has focused more on individual-woodland psychological transactions. However, those at the social and cultural level, to which we now turn, are inextricably related and equally relevant. The idea of ecosystem services is useful for the present purposes for outlining the ‘fruits of the forest.’ This is not to discount alternative designation of rights to trees such as acknowledging *their* intrinsic rights (a non-consequentialist ethic) (Mueller, Pattillo, Mitchell, & Luther, 2011). A key characteristic of the Ecosystems Services approach is the recognition of cultural services and ecosystem cultural goods. Cultural ecosystem services ‘goods’ are identified as being the “non-material benefits people obtain from ecosystems” (Millenium Ecosystem Assessment, 2003, p. 58). Aspects of culture that can benefit from such goods include: spiritual and religious; education and knowledge; inspiration and aesthetic; social relations; sense of place; cultural heritage; recreation and ecotourism (Millenium Ecosystem Assessment, 2003, pp. 58-59). For example, ecosystems, including woodlands, “provide a rich source of inspiration for art, folklore, national symbols, architecture, and advertising” (Millenium Ecosystem Assessment, 2003, p. 58). As Laird points out,

Forest and culture have intertwined throughout human history. Forest landscapes are formed and are strongly characterized [sic.] by cultural belief and management systems, and cultures are materially and spiritually built upon the physical world of the forest. Just as people have acted upon and altered forests throughout history, so too have forests profoundly influenced human consciousness and culture. (Laird, 1999, p. 347)

This is certainly true of the pre-Industrial British Isles where practical forest management was part of everyday life providing key material ‘goods’ such as wood and timber for fuel and building materials, fruits and nuts, etc. Unfortunately, much of this cultural knowledge has apparently waned and terms such as ‘copse’ and ‘grove’ have lost their relevance in everyday life. But woods were much more than a ‘supermarket’, they also formed the basis of “a great deal of myth, legend and lore” (Laird, 1999, p. 351).

The forests in European culture were also considered to be a more positive site of miracles, the source of great spiritual awakenings; and the forest itself was held to be a form of primitive church or temple. The first temples in Europe were forest groves, and although progressively replaced with temples made of woods, and subsequently churches made of stone, places of worship – particularly those of Gothic architecture – continue to evoke the forest with their design and proportions. (Laird, 1999, p. 351)

This notion of cultural goods is commensurate with that of “*information functions*—the capacity to contribute to human well-being through knowledge and experience and sense of relationship with context, e.g. spiritual experiences, aesthetic pleasure, cognition and recreation” (Agbenyega et al., 2009, p. 552). Church et al. (2011) emphasise the importance of the “environmental setting” as one meta-source of such goods or “information functions.” This is the context “in which people can be located together and with nature in place and in time, allowing interaction with others and with the living world” (p. 646). And it provides “multiple assemblages of living and non-living features, species, spaces and opportunities for people to satisfy needs by creating a range of activities, experiences, attachments, feelings, emotions and memories which are meaningful” (p. 655). The authors relate the notion of ‘environmental settings’ to the UKNEA’s eight broad habitat types including ‘woodland’ (UK National Ecosystem Assessment, 2011). The cultural services associated with the Woodland environmental setting identified are:

- trees and woodlands are valuable for personal enlightenment and as places or catalysts for social activity and cohesion;
- forests are increasingly acknowledged for their educational value;
- trees have been perpetual motifs in fine art, and influenced many other art forms;
- many forests are open to the public for the enjoyment of outdoor pursuits and recreational activities;
- their access facilitates exercise and benefits human health and longevity;
- Trees and woodlands increase the diversity of landscape character; their existence provides a link with the past when man’s existence was more closely linked to woodlands and their products;

- woodlands reduce the rate of, or eliminate the need for, cultivation, a significant cause of archaeological destruction. (verbatim extracts selected from Quine et al., 2011, p. 263)

Thus, woodlands (and related naturally wooded spaces such as forests, copses etc.) represent a major *potential* context for benefitting from a range of ecosystem goods or information services. In this paper I therefore advocate that the full potential of the particular “multiple assemblages” represented by woodlands be acknowledged as superior environmental settings for realising cultural ecosystem services than contrived or manufactured simulacra (Baudrillard, 1994), such as might be created in a school’s grounds. The true multiple functional potential is then a consequence of the ‘affordances’ presented by the trees and woodlands. Metaphorically, woodlands (proper) can be variously seen at one and the same time, as a variety of contexts, as expressed in Table 1.

Table 1. The ‘metaphoric’ affordances of woodland for educational purposes

<b>Metaphor</b>	<b>Emphasis on:</b>
Stand and Copse	wood and timber products
Larder	foodstuffs
Nature Reserve	Biodiversity; habitat stewardship
Gathering place	socialisation
Field Laboratory	environmental ‘scientific’ learning
Outdoor Gym/Playground	physical activity and challenge; free-play
Wildwood	imaginative space of psychogeography; storytelling
Sacred Grove	spiritual development; intimate connection to nature
Green Workshop	place of manufacture and woodworking/bodging
Outdoor Studio	art and creativity

This provides a suggested and not exhaustive list of ways in which woodland should be approached to achieve a full complement of educational goods. Arguably, someone who is silvanative possesses the requisite PCK to exploit each and every one of these opportunities as appropriate. Thus, FS practitioners should, ideally, be conceptually but also

phenomenologically tuned in to the myriad goods afforded by woodland. Too often, however, it seems that those acting as FS mentors might have a rather limited or single-vision understanding of the potential.

### **Cultural Dimension: Branching across Communities of Practice**

According to the analysis above, two prescriptions for improving OEL in woodland contexts (and by implication, FS) are: to select authentic woodland settings; and/or to move practitioners from silvanaïve to silvanative (by which we now mean someone who has the PCK to utilise a woodland in all manners outlined in Table 1). The latter might be thought of as a simple matter of providing adequate continuing professional development. However, the situation is much more complex. In his nuanced critique, Leather (2018) identifies FS as an undertheorized ‘social construction’ requiring critical examination. This foregrounds an important dimension to these debates, namely the sociocultural and the manner in which individuals are socialised and/or enculturated into a particular set of practices. Such a perspective allows one to think of FS not as a monolithic, standardised and homogenous phenomenon but rather multiple, as a consequence of cultural transmission, translation and transfer across different contexts. Equally, in response to the discussion above, it allows one to consider instances of mistranslation, diminished transfer, partial enculturation and/or, indeed, cultural appropriation.

Becoming a professional requires one to internalise the knowledge, skills, values and norms shared with fellow members and thereby joining an existing “community of practice” (COP) which involves “situated learning” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in a particular professional or practitioner context or culture. This relates to the earlier discussion since all COPs will be characterised by those undergoing induction of newcomers (so called immigrants) into that community or culture who are being mentored by those already native to it. To become a classroom practitioner in a formal context requires a movement from immigrant to native whereby ones PCK is commensurate with the particular social setting and culture and associated norms and practices of schooling. A similar (in terms of trajectory of moving from immigrant to native) albeit quite different (in terms of specific values, norms, practices and underpinning philosophies) process, is involved in the social construction of an OEL practitioner. It is quite another thing for an individual to transition from one COP, e.g. formal school-based education, into a distinctive one: OEL. This is what Leather (2016) means by referring to mainstream teachers becoming FS practitioners as “outdoor immigrants” if they

haven't undergone the requisite "induction" processes into OEL. What is required is time, support by suitably 'native' mentors and critical reflection to achieve the relevant higher levels of PCK in this new COP, something that is potentially lacking within prevailing training packages and certification schemes.

It is important to acknowledge that these represent developmental or learning processes that are 'situated' within particular professional contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991); and that each COP has its own 'culture' which is reified through bonding processes to create social capital (Eames, 2005) within it. To transition between COPs, or at least facilitate communication between them, requires bridging between the different social capitals (Eames, 2005). The question then becomes, is the current level of FS Certification adequate to the development of fully inducted OEL practitioners with the requisite PCK to deliver learning in the woodland environment to its full potential? Of course the reverse prevails (i.e., one could not expect an outdoor native to be initially anything other than a formal education immigrant). More than this, it cautions that in the seemingly simple process of supporting a formally trained teacher to become a fully-fledged OEL practitioner runs the risk of diminishing the potential of FS through the cultural transfer identified by Waite and Pratt (2011), where OEL generally, or FS specifically, is being made subservient to, or culturally appropriated to serve the agenda of, formal schooling in terms of raising achievement, delivering the formal curriculum etc.

In some contexts the notion of the forest as a literal and metaphoric wild and expansive space of risk, excitement, freedom, exploration and intimate contact with nature which underpins the original FS concept seems to be giving way to a diluted sense of controlled spaces and activities for curriculum enrichment. This is a real issue in FS discourse. OBrien and Murrays additional characteristic marking FS out from other types of OEL, that "learning linked to the national curriculum and foundation-stage objectives" (OBrien & Murray, 2006, p. 4), represents a questionable diagnostic criterion. On the one hand it rather restricts it geographically to a UK or indeed English context; and on the other it tends to constrain it sectorally, i.e., implying that FS properly belongs to the formal (as opposed to informal and non-formal) educational sector. Where such an instrumental goal is foregrounded or indeed, becomes the *raison d'être* of FS practice it represents a significant diminution of the potential. Fortunately, the authors qualify this statement in the more detailed exposition of these features on page six of their report with the term might. They also, albeit it as somewhat of an aside, acknowledge that "it is important to note that the potential for Forest School reaches far beyond primary and secondary education" (OBrien &

Murray, 2006, p. 7). I propose the neologism *scolonisation* (from the Old English root *scōl* from which we derive the word, and concept, of a school as a *formal* place of learning) to describe the cultural appropriation of cultural innovations by formal schooling, and to draw parallels with the broader process of Western colonisation and colonialism. Thus, in some ways this paper is a call to a defence of the original or primal vision of FS and for the adoption of a relatively anti- or de-scolonisation perspective (drawing inspiration from the broader anti- and de-colonisation movements which champion non-Western and indigenous cultures and knowledge systems as legitimate in their own right).

## **Conclusion**

From a small number of early innovators and adopters (Rogers, 2003) such as Bridgewater College in Somerset and Bishops Wood Environmental Education Centre in Worcestershire, FS has been disseminated and adopted widely both geographically and sectorally (from relatively informal into more mainstream formal settings) within the UK. Consequently, there is now a mixed economy of FS provision involving public sector; private sector; and third sector organisations. Also, there has been a trend towards individual schools (a consequence of the increasing decentralisation of educational governance away from Local Education Authorities) to promote FS within *their* school grounds. Whilst this rapid scaling up can be broadly welcomed, it has resulted in some subtle (and not so subtle) transformations of the FS model in some instances, which this paper has sought to critically explore. There are some critical questions to be asked about the extent to which the potential of Forest Schools is being compromised. This paper has critiqued some of the ways that the FS concept has been enacted more recently as it has been scaled-up from a relatively small-scale, scarce, but consequently relatively pure or ideal phenomenon towards more commonplace yet potentially adulterated instances of practice going by the name FS. Furthermore, it has raised a worrying emerging trend that, in the minds of some, FS is considered *the* way to do OEL and is equated principally with early years and primary school phases with limited emphasis on older learners and intergenerational learning except in particular segments of society, for whom main-stream schooling is failing. Thus, FS has become somewhat mass produced, more domesticated, commercialised, standardised and schooled (see e.g. Leather, 2016). Whilst there are undoubted benefits to this scaling-up, there are some dangers also, including scolonisation.

In this paper, I have ranged beyond the personal and professional level to consider the cultural and cultural transfer. Tabbush (2010) discusses the cultural assets (physical attributes of a place) alongside the notion of embodied cultural capital which emphasises the background culture of the individual. This relates well to the preceding discussions which argues that these are two sides of the coin, or the two axes of the model presented in Figure 1, which need to be considered in relation to the realising the potential of FS or woodland-based OEL. On the one hand, there are the particular cultural assets or affordances of the spaces or particular places of learning which can be perceived to exist along a spectrum from relatively rich (in truly wooded environments) to poor or devoid (in contrived settings with limited tree cover) – x-axis of Figure 1. On the other hand there is the embodied cultural capital of practitioners which can be perceived to exist along a spectrum from relatively low to high – y-axis. For typical UK-practitioners, this aspect is likely to be relatively low given the general cultural disconnect with woodlands in recent centuries. The paper argues that it is when the cultural assets and embodied cultural capital are both high – a natural woodland and a silvanative practitioner – the best outcomes are possible.

It is important to acknowledge that becoming silvanative is something that is “learned intergenerationally or through the education one might receive” (Mueller et al., 2011, p. 298). Given that UK culture lacks a close affinity to nature amongst the general populace, it will be through programs such as FS that this process will be achieved. Indeed, FS represents perhaps the best opportunity in this respect given its broadly widespread acceptance across the educational community. What is necessary, however, and what I am essentially arguing, is to ensure that those elders who facilitate such programs are themselves silvanative so they can pass on all the fruits of the forest to the next generations, whether that be young people or newly inducted OEL practitioners.

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