

# FS Values, Co-operation and Competition



Mel McCree for FSA Conference 2013

# What's it all about?

- What are the common values in FS?
- Are they reflected in our work?
- How does free market competition affect them?
- Is co-operation a realistic solution to some of the challenges ahead?

# The future is... bleak

UNDER THREAT

- economic stability
- education
- woods and green space
- childhood

PRIVATISED

FOR SALE

ENCLOSED



# Neoliberalism in a nutshell

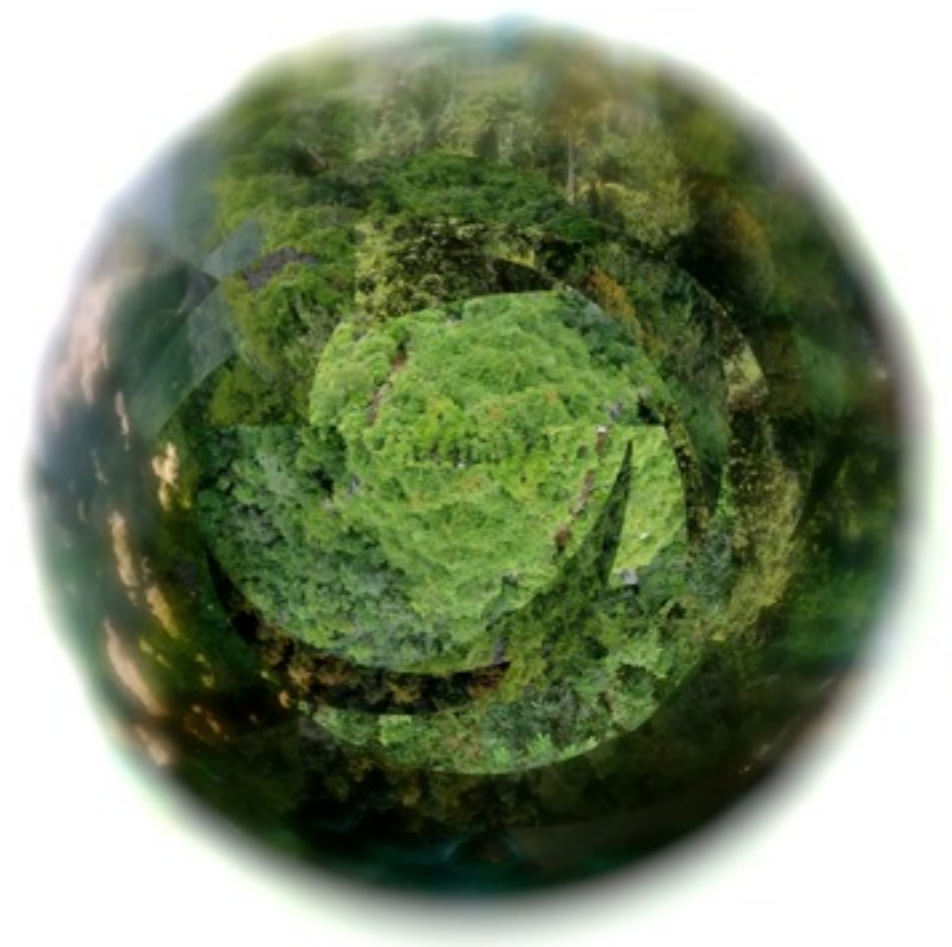
- individualisation - me culture, aspiration
- dream sold: we can be anything we want to be
- the Janus face of freedom
- unregulated free market
- larger businesses dominate, MNCs
- widening gap between rich and poor
- profit in hands of very few
- destroys social & community resources

# Neoliberal education

- league table targets led by economic values: race to the top, or the bottom
- academic achievement prioritised
- teachers under pressure
- curriculum set to meet targets
- private sector investment and control
- less green space for schools & settings
- play and outdoors not valued or measured

# How does FS fit in?

- Variable values, price, quality, ethos
- *Whole* Forest School
- Forest School *Light*
- Forest School *Ultra Light*



# Whole FS

- 'Full fat' or 'whole grain'
- supportive conditions
- FS Principles: all elements in place
- values reflected in action
- whole team: connected to setting
- transformative potential
- culture change

# FS Principles in brief

- long-term process
- natural wooded environment
- relationship with the natural world
- holistic development
- supported risks
- professional practice
- learner-centred & play processes



# Forest School *Light*

- compromised practice: tokenistic, isolated
- values in conflict - at odds with setting
- reduced length, choice, biodiversity, risk, play
- pragmatic choices: *'a way in'*
- *'we can't afford the full version'*
- *'we don't have enough time'*
- *'we can't go to the woods'*
- *'we need activities, we can't just play'*

# Forest School *Ultra Light*

- Rinsed of original meaning & potency
- Run by companies with different values
- Little adequate training
- Little connections with FS community
- Where are the trees?
- length, choice, biodiversity, risk, play

# Babcock case study

- Large multi-national company
- Leader in armaments & weapons
- Acquired Devon CC education services tender, sold off in cuts
- Investing in education as growth area for private sector
- Aspires to be dominant market leader
- Values at odds to FS ethos

# Consequences

- Who makes the decisions?
- Where does the money go?
- What do they know about pedagogy?
- How are workers supported?
- Is it ok for a company that makes bombs to provide FS?
- Incongruent values

# Choices in our role

- What can we do? Is practice enough?
- Russell - the role of the playworker is to create the conditions for play to happen
- Wider community development role
- Create conditions for whole FS
- Compete or co-operate?

# FS in competition

- Growing market - supply and demand
- Increasing private sector presence
- Pitched against each other
- Tokenistic: trade off for sellable value
- Free market model of economic values
- Bigger business - not local

# FS in co-operation

- local networks of social solidarity
- national collective voice & advocacy
- connect with others on access to spaces
- shared resources, land and sites
- skill sharing
- contribute to creating best practice
- local economy

# Wider co-operation?

- training: co-operating over local quality, full ethos, trainers immersed in practice
- FS as entitlement: absorbed into mainstream education system
- whole team approach: share new perspectives, raise value, myth busting
- otherness, difference and diversity: holding the possibility for inclusive national practice, focus on solutions



# Co-op cons?

- Collaboration as burnout
- Social resources appropriated
- Big Society rhetoric
- Volunteer roles - localism agenda
- Work our way out of a job?
- Decreasing value for our skills
- not hard nosed enough?

# The future is.....?

- What possible options are there?
- Inclusive: valuing difference & diversity
- FS as hybrid: widening, connecting
- new jobs, new frontiers
- roles within eco-social change
- 'hard nosed' co-operative values

# Hold the question

- what might Forest School be?

# Thank you!

Now it's your turn...  
What do you think?

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