Synthesis report about the scientific support implementing the **Scrapstore PlayPod** on three sites in France and Spain

Preface

In 2006, Bristol City Council and Children's Scrapstore, (a children's charity), wanted to improve the play offer in primary schools, to meet the objectives set out in the governments play strategy of the time. They invited two other local authorities—South Gloucestershire and Bath & North East Somerset—to form a working group and apply for funding. This resulted in an action research project called Scrapstore *PlayPods*: *"Investigating the benefits of improving outdoor play environments in primary schools for the purpose of supporting children's development, learning and play experiences."*

From this research project, Scrapstore PlayPods[1] was born: A process that works with the entire school community to change both the human and physical play environments; transforming play at lunchtimes.

The transition from research to service and product delivery was a gradual and tentative one, but since its introduction to schools over seven years ago Scrapstore PlayPods have created a strong culture around play and risk in school playtimes with clients describing very positive changes in children, staff and the climate of the school in general.

In February 2015 we became a key partner on an Erasmus+ Knowledge Transfer Partnership, piloting Scrapstore PlayPods in France and Spain called "Outdoor Play & Sustainable Development in Educational Structures". Over the last 24 months we have supported project partners to make observations and assessments of the play areas in educational settings, identify suitable Scrapstore PlayPod sites for the pilot and share skills and knowledge through meetings and training seminars. It was fantastic to see children enjoying using the first Scrapstore PlayPods in France and Spain, which opened in spring 2016 with great success.

This Synthesis offers an in-depth, acute observation of the impact of introducing loose parts into play environments in different educational settings and the impact it has on the children's behaviour during their free time: their approach to the 'The PlayPod Game'.

The observations in the research explore and examine the impact this project has had on professional practices within the playground and the paradoxes that this creates within educational agendas. Also demonstrated are the necessary "physical and human environmental conditions/interventions" needed for a successful implementation. In particular practitioners reported an increased consciousness of risk and implementation of risk controls into their practice, as the children's play dramatically changed in response to the introduction of loose parts.

All research is valid, and essential diversifications inform rather than detract. It is of particular interest to note, therefore, that in Spain the project was delivered to an age group not previously supported where there were other conditions and factors which would not normally be encountered. The findings indicated that the research within the older age group fared as well as those in Britain, but with the younger age range the conditions significantly changed altering the impact and functionality, to which the astute observations of the Spanish team testify.

The findings were never-the-less of great use and the cultural differences were as informative as the play. The success of the Spanish experience compared with the French and British ones would possibly be identifies by the need to clearly address approaches and ideas for the older age ranges in children and adults to see what might be different from the first attempt. Preparation would therefore be key. Although we anticipated that

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[1] Scrasptore PlayPods® is a registered brand

there would be cultural and social differences it has been fascinating and reassuring to see how this project has identified many similarities and successes to the English model.

With the help of such an august body as the University of Paris 13 Sorbonne Paris Cité and the expertise which has been available from all parties throughout we believe this report demonstrates that robust systems and professional support result in successful collaborations and programmes on behalf of children everywhere.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the partners for their contributions and success in delivering this exciting project and in particular the role and management of La Ligue de l'enseignement's personnel in bringing this project to completion. We hope that these positive early steps will set the foundations for more children to experience high quality play opportunities in schools across Europe.

Daniel Rees-Jones & Kirsty Wilson
Scrapstore PlayPod

I. Introduction

This research report is a scientific summary of the implementation of the PlayPod in three sites, two in France (a primary school in Paris and a Leisure centre in the suburb of Paris) on in Spain (an infant school for students under the age of 3 years in the town of Manresa, Barcelona).

A PlayPod, as its name already suggests, is literally a pod to play with. In this case, children have access to the container, which is designed to store selected recycled items and objects

Children's Scraptore is a British organization that collects waste materials from different kinds of businesses and recycles them to create new resources and creative materials. Materials and resources are stored in a depot in Bristol, from which members of the organization may take all they need and then turn back for future reuse by other members. In this depot all kinds of materials for creative games can be found: paper, cardboard, foam, flower pots, plastic tubes, nets, fabric pieces, books, CDs, etc.

Scraptore PlayPods introduce children to freely play with unrelated objects, "loose parts", especially in primary schools. PlayPods are like "treasure chests" with tons of resources and materials that stimulate the creativity of children and encourages them to experiment with them, socialize while sharing these objects and to enjoy their playtime.

This project is a collaboration between different countries within the Erasmus+ "Outdoor Games and sustainable development in educational structures" program, coordinated by the French organization *La Ligue de l'Enseignement*. The initial programmatic premises of this project are the ones that follow:

Time dedicated to outdoor games in schools and play centres has been drastically reduced. Schoolyards are usually the only space outdoors where children can play freely. However, pedagogically speaking, schoolyards lack games, are intrinsically chaotic and accidents happen in them. This makes them a very stressful scenario for any team of educators. On the other hand, we observe that the more objects our society produces, the more waste of all kinds is also produced: unsold factory production, defective products, and objects that are deemed unfashionable, which are reutilized and recycled in non-optimal ways. To give an answer to these observations, our project bases itself on the approach performed by Children's Scrapstore in Britain. The project called "Outdoor Games and Sustainable Development within Educational Structures", is therefore focused on achieving the following goals:

- Transform the human and physical environment outside educational structures, in order for children to be able to live high-quality experiences during their extra-curricular time by means of games aimed to reusing of objects;
- Change the appearance and nature of games within formal educational structures, in order to improve our knowledge of the role and impact of games in the lives of children, thus increasing their importance and promoting them.

The project consists in the implementation of the Scrapstore PlayPod methodology both in French school and Leisure centre and in Spanish nursery schools. The goal behind this international collaboration goes beyond just knowledge exchange: It was critical for measuring the impact of this pedagogical device in each location, in order to adapt it to

different local contexts and advise local entities about its relevance for children's development.

Six organizations have collaborated in this project:

- Children's Scrapstore: creators of this innovative device.
- *Association Jouer pour Vivre* ("Play to Live" Association; France).
- *La Ligue de l'Enseignement* ("The Education League": A French social movement devoted to education).
- *Encís*: A cooperative devoted to offer services to the people.
- Two research institutions: Experice from University Paris 13- Sorbonne Paris Cité in France and the Ferrer i Guàrdia Foundation in Spain.

Within this project, the educational innovations tested in Britain have been transferred to France and Spain as well as diagnoses have been performed on the exact situation of outdoor games in education centres in these two countries.

In the two countries and the three locations where the project was implemented, the fieldwork was always given support by research teams that generated reports on the application of the project in the different contexts. This document is the synthesis of the two research reports from the French and the Spanish teams.

The order of the presentation is from the closest from the Children's Scrapstore project, France, to the farthest, Spain.

II. The French research

The interest of the Scrapstore PlayPod is undoubtedly related to the fact that it takes place in a cultural context characterized by a certain number of evolutions of the children's ways of playing to which it is opposed and for which it offers alternatives. Among those evolutions, one may quote:

- Objects and more particularly toys take up more and more space and have greater importance in the children's environment (Brougère, 2003).
- More and more urban ways of life reduce the space for outdoor games and make the children go back to their bedroom or at least to their home to play (Garnier 2015).
- Nowadays children develop very seldomly playful activities without toys or games, that is to say without any support meant for this purpose.
- Toys are more and more elaborate as they have determined use as regards their shapes and functioning.

By contrast, institutions welcoming children seem to stand against those evolutions which mainly concern the family sphere.

- The world of non-formal Education and leisure programs seems to carry on putting on value to the historic model of play without support.
- The school environment functions on the deprivation mode of any object other than academic even if some children's culture elements are sometimes tolerated.

In this context the Scrapstore PlayPod concept appears as a challenge while suggesting many objects to be used in the playground, and furthermore particular objects such as recycled and *loose parts*. Taking some distance from the toys' offer or more generally manufactured recreational materials, but just as much from limits on material and objects in a playground, the PlayPod offers an unprecedented and experimental situation for children as well as for professionals and researchers.

1 – A few elements about the approach, method and sites

The research on the French PlayPod—which name is "*Boîte à jouer*" or Playbox and we refer now with the English translation to make the difference with the original Scrapstor PlayPod—does not position itself as an evaluation but rather as what we prefer to call a scientific support of its implementation. An evaluation would have needed to define beforehand what was needed to be evaluated. Yet, the system consisting in making accessible to children under certain conditions a whole set of recycled objects that have been carefully chosen, is not common enough in France to have a preliminary evaluation grid. Therefore, it consists in following this implementation and to document the way it is carried out. Furthermore, a true evaluation would have demanded means (sample groups furthermore all things being equal) we did not have, but above all which may likely be criticised. Many means come and limit the logic of evaluation: the sample group is incomparable with the experimental group, interest of novelty which produces a positive effect hard to measure on the experimental side, commitment of the observers in the experience, etc.

What we saw was sufficiently interesting to imagine that an evaluation would have been positive on many points, however we did not do this. We followed from the beginning (choice of the site, meetings with the professionals, training of the teams) to the end (closing up the Playbox at the end of observed periods) the implementation of this system to see what was happening, how it happened, and what the different participants had to say. Locating this implementation in its context is essential to grasp differentiated effects according to the welcoming and organization conditions.

From a methodological point of view, we adopted an ethnographic approach which consists in being present, to see and hear what is going on. It takes root in the importance of physical presence (the researcher is present with the people he/she observes), a moment of sharing, a form of participation in the situation, even if it is peripheral. The four researchers therefore globally carried out more than 60 observations before and after implementing the French PlayPod on the two sites. If this participation is at a distance from the children's, it is not very far from the adults' that are present during the same situations. It consists in a participative observation, however with a participation will fully maintained in the margin or a peripheral participation. If sight is essential, we supported it by taking photos and making videos to be able to document what we saw and study it in further details. Our work first and foremost emphasises on describing what the children do as well as the adults who are supervising them in this venture where all were equally involved.

This does not mean that we did not pay careful attention to what some and others said, and on the grounds of our observations we essentially asked them questions in the manner of collective interviews (17 collective interviews carried out with children before and after the implementation of the Playbox; 7 with the organisers and managers of the two sites). If we take their words into account, it seems essential to relate them to the actions, practices, whether recreational in some cases, or professional otherwise. The research emphasizes practices, what the Playbox makes one do, and in what manner it transforms (or not) those practices.

This ethnographic approach has another essential consequence which consists in not generalising our results. We study two "social settings" (Layder, 2006), two singular configurations (and very different from one another), and the effects that we emphasize should not be considered as valid outside these configurations. Of course, one may imagine that in similar situations, many elements we emphasized could happen again, but this remains to be checked. We are therefore far from any universal approach, in particular of psychological order, which would aim at emphasizing phenomena valid for all and in any

place. We are developing a situated approach, where elements of context, local practices, culture (of a country or a playground) are taken into account.

It indeed consists in grasping how a system (the word does not only refer to the material aspect—the Playbox and the objects—but also to words and practices, in particular the training which accompany it) initially developed within another cultural context (that of England, of its schools and game cultures and recreation that are partly different) may make sense, and be appropriate to a new context. This is the process we call scientific support; seeing what is done, taking into account singular situations, analysing them in depth which allows to draw theoretical elements that are not a generalisation but conceptualisations from two particular cases.

The experience concerns on the one hand a Parisian primary school, Anselme, during the lunchtime break, which refers back to the English model, on the other hand a suburban leisure centre [a kind of afterschool program during holidays], Tilleul, within a primary school.

The two locations chosen to carry out this system are different. These differences stand mainly on several aspects. One of the first differences is the moment chosen to open the Playbox. At Anselme, the Playbox will be opened during the lunchtime break, during school time, whereas at Tilleul, it will be used as a recreational support during several periods of free time between activities, "in-between" time within the leisure centre program, during the children's holidays. Another concerns the number of children; around 120 can play simultaneously in the Anselme playground, or even more depending on the attendance of the workshops opened at the same time, against around twenty at Tilleul, the whole of them gathered in the playground without any concurrent activity offered, except playing in the playground at something else than the Playbox. Finally we may underline a difference concerning the pedagogical project and the organiser team. Whereas a team, at Anselme, is working with a pedagogical project collectively elaborated and thought about through experiences, the other team, at Tilleul, seems to have more difficulty on this point, with a less elaborated project and a management which does not unite its team around it.

Finally, several major elements that refer as much to temporality (succession of periods of using the Playbox throughout the day and not only during lunchtime; activity developed during the school holidays and no longer throughout the year) as to the aim (no longer recreation as opposed to school time, but free time opposed to an organised time run by the organisers), or even to the number of children, mark a distance of one of the experiments from the English model, which shows adaptation problems on which we will come back.

2 – Children's practices

Transformation of space

You just need a glance to see what extent the Playbox took in particular in the playground at Anselme. A few minutes after opening it, objects are everywhere and all the spaces in the playground are busy with various installations and games. Only the hall and toilets are not

invaded, insofar as the rules established by the professionals forbid it. Objects are everywhere in the playground—or nearly—and above all in every nook and cranny. This no doubt one of the interests of the Playbox which in a certain manner makes the best use of the space while allowing a better occupancy. The corners and more widely the periphery of the playground are as a matter of fact particularly interesting for the children because they allow them to lean their installations against a gate or a fence which are used as supports but also mainly to delimit a space, which makes the corners even more interesting.

Observations before the Playbox allow understanding that the Playbox gives a chance to bypass rules of using the space which sometimes appeared very strict. At the Tilleul leisure centre, the children have for example taken over a space usually banned by passing through a gate and setting up on the grass which has not right of access except to go and fetch a ball thrown too far. In the case of the Anselme School, the playing area developed as far as behind and even inside the hut set up to store objects. In the two playgrounds, groups of children set up according to their liking as they lay down their objects and the distribution of spaces hardly ever causes any problem.

Access to the objects
The system put forward leads to a veritable rush to the Playbox. As soon as they are out in the playground, the children rush to get hold of the objects that they covet in order to play at what they like the most. The first there manage to have choice strategies more targeted according to the desire of the moment. In this rush, the most popular objects and in particular the biggest, such as a wheelchair and pushchairs, are monopolised in priority all the more as they have been placed in front of the Playbox to allow an easier access to the other objects. Access to objects is more complicated at Anselme School for those who come last and find an empty or nearly empty box.

In the case of Tilleul leisure centre, the modalities for access have been slightly modified, as the shape of the Playbox and its size compelled the professionals to reduce direct access to the children. Before its opening, the objects were laid on the ground on a quite big surface area which allowed several children to help themselves simultaneously. As the number of children was sometimes very reduced, on certain days, nearly all of them had the possibility to be in front of the Playbox at the same time, which theoretically made the choice and sharing easier. But the fact is that practices revealed to be quite close.

The two modalities of the system lead to develop strategies of acquisition of objects: it consists in taking possession of objects and accumulating them, sharing them with one's team players, exchanging and swopping, even, failing this, pinching them. These issues were the subject matter of long discussions during the interviews. However, one may also consider this logic of accumulation and this object hunt, "Gotta catch 'em all", as the first game or the global game of the Playbox. If children may first wish to have access to the most desired objects, in particular objects with wheels, failing this, the strategy of accumulation corresponds to the specificity of the Playbox; the children take as many objects as possible and see in a second step what to do with them.

Accumulation may have surprised even shocked the adults, but this refers back to the nature of the material where their functions are not determined in advance. Accumulating leads to making piles, managing deposits, gathering treasures and then engaging a whole lot of actions. The objects owner may either use them, or exchange them to access a more desired or useful object for him, but exchanging is difficult when the children have the same projects and the same view on desirability. Swopping is a game as it can be seen among a group who say having taken as many objects as possible to make an "*exchange stand*" or a "*giant barter market*". Exchanging becomes a game which consists solely in passing the objects around independently of their use.

From this accumulation limiting access to objects results activities of object hunting. However the border is weak between picking up, hunting and pinching, all the more as pinching is generalised and the person who is being robbed may also be a robber. However, is it really robbery? The children willingly say it is not when it is after all.

Are we in or out of the game? The interest of such a situation is to be at the border, it may be a game for one but not for the other who is going to complain or cry. The organisers are sensitive to these conflicts noticing at the same time they do not last, they do not degenerate as opposed to more personal conflicts before the setting up of the Playbox. Mediation of the object would therefore play its role as avoiding too strong a relationship between two children in favour of a relationship through an object, what is more without any value. Of course, some children may have a different view, showing the seriousness of these conflicts, and robberies, however they transform them just as much in epic adventures as soon as one asks them to talk about their practices in the interviews.

In order to stop the nuisance of the robbers and the disappearance of the accumulation of objects, the children looked for watchmen who in certain situations were deprived of any play. The situation being often very unfavourable to younger children led to the intervention of the organisers and the children had to find other modalities, for example that the watchman became player (was authorized to play) or even that children of different ages and forms could be associated in the game, when the lunch hour is shifted as at Anselme.

Catching, taking, accumulating, pinching or keeping in certain conditions are structurally part of the logic of the game, allowing to develop a game of monopole, a "*Monopoly*", a playful initiation to capitalistic economy (paradoxical with recycled objects). As a matter of fact, the Playbox offers an abundance of material linked to the principle of recycling material which does not cost anything, and seems to allow unlimited consumption. However, this abundance,

as we saw, leads to accumulation by some, which systematically produces artificial shortages. Therefore, some accumulate while others lack, however this remains a game in the sense that the lack remains in the scope of the game and everything is (or should be) set back to zero at every new break.

Accumulation with the whole of the actions it leads to, including wars and looting we will talk about later, is indeed a central element, the Playbox game, to be distinguished from the games each object allows. If each child, individually or within a group, plays with certain objects, one may consider that collectively the whole of the children involved play the Playbox game, one of the most outstanding games from what the children say, even if certain actions being at the border of game and no-game may be rejected by some as game. This reminds that play is first and foremost a matter of framing, of meaning given to the activities carried out and there may be, as we saw, conflict of interpretation.

Exploring affordances

For many objects not well defined by their appearance, it means taking them and seeing afterwards what one can do with them. After the initial Accumulation, exploration will be the answer. The child is in front of objects with which he/she can play but which may not as easily as toys, reveal at first sight, the actions that may result from them. Hence the recurring question "what am I going to do with this?" which refers to exploration of affordances, that is to say not only finding out what an object can do, which refers to usual forms of exploration, but what we can do with the object which refers to exploration with a playful purpose or exploration of playful affordances. We already mentioned a general playful affordance through object accumulation and hunt.

One may raise the subject of the affordance of the box itself, explored and exploited by the children inside as much as outside with the area (called "tunnel") that it contributes to create with the playground fence. As far as objects are concerned, affordances lead to discovering the production of sound (blowing, drumming), making a barrel roll with a child inside, protecting oneself with a sheet, making a roof out of it, using a hose as a weapon and the dustbin lid as a shield,… We cannot mention the whole of the discoveries, however two essential elements must be noted. Affordances are not solely linked to objects taken separately however, on the one hand to their association (a reel and a big hose can make a cannon), on the other hand to objects in the playground environment (the swing is the meeting between trees, a rope and a hose).

Once the objects are accumulated, once certain affordances are explored, many objects are not used alone (a privilege for some of them in particular rolling objects); one operation consists in associating them beyond sheer contiguity of accumulation, which consists in making piles and protecting them. One may distinguish three main types of layout: installations, assemblies and constructions.

The first minimum operation is the installation, that is to say putting up together objects sometimes simply for the sake of putting together (as in cases of sculptures or structures with a purely aesthetic aspect or of sheer layouts). The most frequent installation consists in creating areas, delineating places, without one being able to speak about a construction (using material as a carpet, different objects for delineating, etc.). This refers to a primary hut, the one evoked by Dominique Bachelart (2012, p.20) "Delineating an area can be basic. It does not yet consist in a construction, rather a delimitation, a 'surrounding' […]. The barely outlined contour gives form to an inside and an outside."

The installation becomes more complicated and makes sense when it is not only about installing or delineating an area but also when settling oneself down, making it possible to have an activity inside the set limits. This type of installation using materials, foam elements, lamp shades, decoration elements has often been seen and consists in marking a border between the inside and outside of the installation and to confer a little meaning to this inside (office area for example with keyboards and telephones). The objects are laid down, put one next to the other, with an oscillation between a choice, a clear logic and random effect which consists in using what has been recycled. One game consists in being in an appropriate marked area (objects being used to appropriate, to mark the space) with friends. What is striking is the permanent evolution of a good number of installations: new objects appear, others disappear, their organisation changes and sometimes the whole lot undergoes a "removal" the logic of which one does not always understand except that a more attractive nook becomes available or is discovered. Mobility of the activities is an essential feature of the system in convergence with the logic of the playground where children appear to be very mobile.

Another object association approach: assembling which consists in no longer simply laying down, installing but associating, gathering together, that is to say making elements interdependent, and ideally in view of an action. Mention may also be made of a few examples often observed; one concerning rolling with objects to be dragged or on which to settle up to be rolled (like a kart or a cannon), the other concerning sliding with the realisation of circuits (marble runs or others), however the most frequent assembly aims at swinging oneself by realising (after many trials) more and more appropriate assemblies (rope with a cylinder or tyre) to make swings.

Assembling refers to a more complex analysis of affordances, as it consists in not only discovering the affordance of an object but also of the layout, assembly of a system, the affordance resulting from the child's action, from the assembly.

Construction which constitutes the third type of association is difficult to distinguish from the assembly however we will keep it for more ambitious logics than assembly of a limited number of pieces to make a new object. It consists in more complicated systems, which unlike installations, imply the construction, interdependence of components (mainly with ropes) and a certain sustainability. This is the case of huts which need a roof layout or even interior arrangements. Construction implies the existence of a project and to do so objects sometimes

need to be fetched to complete those one disposes of. Building huts is a central activity on the two sites all the more as it can then be developed into various games using the hut. However, one may underline that the constructions have a tendency to never be finished, to always be changed, modified, improved, in a process of continuous evolution. For these constructions, problems need to be constantly solved with available resources (objects of the Playbox and playground layout), the solutions found may be then taken up by others. If one associates creativity and problem solving, this is indeed a creative action.

Objects that make sense: interpreting
The game is not only doing, it also refers to the sense one gives to what one is doing, which evokes pretending or symbolic game. It seems to us that the notion of interpretation is most capable to understand this movement. Objects give room for interpretations with the double meaning of playing a role and giving sense.

One finds a great many interpretations starting with object hunting becoming a war between clans, but also all the actions which, while acting, give sense to this action which is not reduced to what is done: one may mention the net becoming the gladiator's weapon or the fisherman's within seconds.

One may therefore consider that children build symbolic spaces like offices related to the use of computer keyboards and telephones, domestic spaces where everyday life is developed which can consist in playing "neighbours" between huts, or, with a hint of irony, "play the teenagers". Others will prefer to play the "baddies" or restage Star Wars scenes. Finally, during several days, many children (among the oldest) from Anselme gave life to a massage parlour where the whole of the activity was featured from appointment making up to the massage. This example enables to underline the collective dimension of most of the games, usually isolated children were regularly integrated. Concrete realisations and constructions of sense imply a major collaboration even if that may sometimes take the form of a more or less playful conflict.

To finish, one must underline that usual game categories (such as symbolic game, construction, with rules) that one can find as activity dimensions are little adapted in the analysis of a game which is extremely labile and mobile, multifaceted. The game transforms itself and combines different dimensions. The types of games are scrambled, intertwining these different dimensions such as construction, installation, mobility, accumulation, exploration, symbolisation or interpretation.

One may undoubtedly put this in relation with the idea that such material offers little preliminary script, that is to say few scopes which predefine the legitimate activity with an object as a doll or a figurine from a cartoon may do (without assuming that the player will follow the script). Here no or little script, at the most evident affordances in certain cases, but to be discovered more often through explorations.

The consequence is that the game falls into the category of an open performance, which leads to encourage a variety of actions according to affordances perceived and interpretations carried out. Children constantly discover new affordances or suggest new interpretations through original performances in regards to the previous ones. But in doing so, a repertoire of practices is developed within the playground and one may imagine that a longer duration of the presence of such a system (with the same objects, however, the Playbox has the advantage of enabling the introduction of new objects that are different from the previous ones) may lead to define scripts, uses becoming legitimate within the children community. On the period observed at Anselme (Tilleul is not concerned because of a very limited duration of the experience), even if one may see this repertoire starting to form itself, it is still the invention of performances often new within the school that marks the uses. However, a repertoire of practices is formed around the use of mobile objects, the assembly of swings or cannons, hut building, construction of symbolic games such as the desk. But, at the end of the observation period, that repertoire remains open and the use of the PlayPod remains marked by the diversity of games and their lability. The latter is perhaps fundamental in so far as it adapts itself well to break time, its temporal logic and fragmentation. Changing games, partners, mobility are truly compatible with what the Playbox offers. These are precisely these aspects that may have lacked at Tilleul and must therefore lead to think about an adaptation of the system in a different context to that of the school lunchtime.

3 – Professional practices

The Playbox as a complicated system not only associating the object but also associated trainings and framework tools of professional practices, does not refer to activity traditions as developed in France but rather to *playwork*. If the latter defines itself as game facilitation, while encouraging children's initiatives, it is not a "wait and see approach" as this has often been interpreted by French organisers following trainings. It promotes interventions under condition they support the game progress or even its development while keeping an eye on the risks incurred and conflict resolution or more precisely its progress with neither risk nor conflict. It is compatible with suggestions if need be to offer new play possibilities when the latter are neither perceived nor set up by the children. However, it avoids any intervention dismissing the children's logic of the play by substituting to it other configurations proper to the adults. This position is far from being easy all the more as it is in contradiction with the professional positions of the organisers who are in charge of the whole of the children's leisure time. They globally fluctuate between on the one hand simply keeping an eye without intervening in the children's play except to punish (particularly developed during the lunchtime or free time at the leisure centre) even if it can be accepted to join in a game upon the children's request, and on the other hand the organisation of a game or activity by the

adults where at most the child is free to chose among a range of activities. *Playwork* is neither one nor the other even if a good supervision combined with playful interactions can be a first step in this direction.

However, relating to their professional cultures, the manner the training was received, but also the presence of the initiators of the experience, the organisers rather have a tendency to adopt a wait-and-see attitude fearing that their interventions should not be in compliance with what was expected, limiting them to what they consider as hazardous situations.

Their actions are far from what was suggested during the training: "Move, Observe, Think, Act". When moving permanently, they can therefore understand what is going on in many places as stoppages of play, changes, reconfigurations of groups, etc. It therefore consists in following playful activities and according to occasions, support them while adding what is needed to nourish and develop them through environment modifications, suggestions—or more simply let the actions happen without intervening. As a matter of fact, the action "acting" is carried out as a last resort provided that the children's playful activities are well understood.

With another interpretation, the organisers may have observed however from "fixed" often peripheral points, and moved punctually in particular to respond to the children's requests. Most of their interventions concerned practices they thought too risky and reminding of the new rules set for a more moderate use of the introduced objects. We rarely had the chance to observe tools and protocols given during training to do these interventions and the organisers assessed they neither necessarily had the time nor the availability to do it. On other occasions, they estimated that "it would not work" with these children.

Yet, the main objective of the intervention of the *playworker* is not to "break" the pending *playflow* ("adulteration", playwork term that designates the more or less brutal stop of the flow after adult intervention or a break in the functioning). Even in case of risky practices, his/her positive mode of interventions brings the children to imagine new ways of playing which take into account the said risks…

Supervision therefore took over all the more as it was also driven by the fear of accidents and conflicts. The feeling of a more intense work than usual is also noted, related to increased vigilance. On the one hand, the presence of a great number of objects including certain, in particular rolling objects, that are considered as hazardous, on the other hand, led to make supervision of the playground more complicated. Through the abundance created by the Playbox, the playground was no longer related to a mastered framework constructed mainly to make supervision easier. The positive view of the children's activity, the feeling that accidents, conflicts and punishments decreased, led undoubtedly to progressively limit this tension for most organisers but not all of them. To this is added the abandonment of usual forbidden things in the playground in favour of very general rules (not to be in danger, not to put others in danger) which supposes a constant evaluation of situations no longer *for* but *with* the children. In the absence of such a difficult co-construction to develop for the professionals, practices changed between imposing rules and withdrawing them which could but puzzle the children as to understand what was allowed or not. The vague situation did not however stop them from finding arrangements to develop an action adapted to the situation, some of them asking in an interview for the possibility to regulate by themselves their actions. Clearing up which is globally done at the end and according to observations has always been done in reasonable time, posed a problem at Anselme as some children showed resistance after a few weeks and tended to avoid this moment. Only team coordination and time of reflection on action would have allowed to find solutions, and there again that was lacking.

4 – Appropriation and positive view

On the two experiment sites, it consists in an appropriation of the Playbox in a "social setting" (Layder, 2006), that is to say the immediate environment of the located activity. Yet, as we mentioned it, it consists of two different social settings marked by "the local aggregation of social relationships, positions and reproduced practices" (Layder, 2006: 280). There the logics of the past influence the behaviours of the present, hence the necessity of an observation prior to the arrival of the Playbox. Both structures and their practices tightly linked to space and time organisation produce in situ (located) practices that frame the way of appropriation of the Playbox.

We observed this appropriation in the activities. The children appropriated the Playbox through their games, those concerning the Playbox as a whole as well as those that are specifically supported by an object or a whole set of objects; they gave the Playbox sense through interpretations they create in situation. This appropriation is also generated by the abundant speech on the Playbox, most of the time enthusiastic, sometimes critical on one point or the other. Admittedly, some children were not appealed by the Playbox and sometimes preferred football, others played with it then went back at least partially to other activities. The older ones set up a distance at the end of the period, the distance of those whose passing to secondary school suddenly shows they are bigger and encourages them to play communication games distinguishing them from the smaller children. The Playbox is not intended to federate the whole of the children, but rather to offer an activity among others or to enrich the one already there that often remain at an embryonic state failing resources, and therefore avoid some children getting bored by lack of suggestions.

A perspective between the two experiments shows that a balance between activities allows on the one hand to prevent saturation of the Playbox and disappointments that may result from it, failing to be able to access the material, and on the other hand to offer real choices to the children. Appropriating the Playbox is also trivialising it, making it an activity among others which one may choose only when one wishes and not because it consists in the sole possible activity. However, one must not minimise the enthusiasm and strong interest the Playbox created among some children, in particular at Anselme, as is seen in the disappointment on rainy days when it is not open or the April's fools joke imagined by the school Headmaster.

Appropriating the Playbox is also sharing activities, developing common practices, a repertoire that broadens progressively even if after a period of inventiveness in the first days, reproducing may then take over. However, with such objects, that moreover evolve through deterioration or renewal, it hardly consists of identical reproducing. To reproduce, one must often solve problems for the lack of the material which was used for the previous constructions or assemblies. This appropriation of the Playbox by the children is more evident at Anselme because of the longer time and a situation adapted to the system. The children also appropriated the Playbox at the Tilleul leisure centre despite a least favourable situation which invites the actors to a reflection on the place and implementation modalities of such a system in a leisure centre and/or with fewer children.

The management and organisers team also appropriated the Playbox by developing more or less new professional practices, sometimes with a few difficulties related to the difference of the system as regards French recreational traditions. Their speeches on that experience also show this appropriation even if they may show the tensions it creates. As a matter of fact during interviews, they highlight positive aspects of the Playbox: game mixing children from different forms and age groups and for Tilleul from different districts; less isolated children; if there are conflicts about the objects, they are minor conflicts in contrast with those that previously appeared in the playground; children are happy and less bored; they are creative

and autonomous. Risk taking may be a worry even if some admit that this is part of the educational objectives of breaktime.

The organisers were sensitive to the interest of the Playbox for the children and willingly mention the positive effects. If they can relate their difficulties, they do not relate negative effects. Hence, one finds a difference with the point of view of the English educators during the Scrapstore Playpod experiment (Armitage, 2009) who considered as a negative effect the fighting games with the Playpod objects, which led some of them to consider putting an end to it, but fortunately other games then replaced those ill accepted games. On the French side fight games were accepted on condition that the fighting involved object versus object. We did not feel an "ideological" refusal of playful fight, but rather the idea that it was part of the children's playing culture.

If a synthesis of the assessments of the actors needed to be carried out, it would be a positive one. The few elements gathered from the parents are along the same lines, and this also applies to the teachers although they are not much concerned by the experiment.

5 – Differences between lunchtime break and leisure centre

The comparison between the school context and that of the leisure centre allows understanding better the principles of the Playbox system mostly designed for lunchtime break. All the more so as we were able to observe the opening of the Playbox at the Anselme leisure centre, which uses the same premises and the same playground with the same recreational team as for the lunchtime break. Before going into depth in the differences between these two contexts, one must underline they share common points on the presence of objects, space and the organisation pattern.

On the two sites of the experiment, the welcoming space of the children is the same as the leisure centres very often take place within schools premises that are vacant by principle during holidays. As opposed to what one may expect because of the diversity of activities at the leisure centre, one may note a relative similarity in material management and the minor place it is given. Here, as often but perhaps in a more asserted manner, the toys and more widely the playing material supports are not much present in the playground and are reduced to ritual objects like balls and skipping ropes (in limited numbers). In both cases, the children bring along a few personal objects (Pokémon cards for example) however, always slightly sneakily by playing with the regulation bans.

As far as formalisation is concerned, there again as opposed to what is expected in relation to the dimension of welcome leisure during holiday periods, one may note a temporal organisation very strongly copied on that of the school with constraint activity time and time said free, or "in-between" which strongly resemble breaktime, typical break within the school framework. This pre-cutting led the team to ask themselves many times "when do we open the Playbox?" In the end, with one or two exceptions, the half day at the beginning of each week to discover the system, the Playbox was opened solely during "in-between" times. As though it could not overlap with the time of activities or outings thus reinforcing the similarity between both experiment contexts whereas welcome on complete leisure days would have allowed other modalities.

The first difference is nevertheless on temporality in terms of duration of use. At the Anselme school the Playbox offers actions for the children on a very rhythm-based and limited time: the duration of the opening of the Playbox is one hour and a half, however, considering lunchtime and clearing up time, in reality each child only has around one hour to play. The school context with its ruling power imposes these constraints to be accepted by the children without any possible negotiation. The institutional passage between lunchtime break and

school also imposes that the Playbox should be closed and put away… At Tilleul, the rhythm is different in the sense that there are three to four "free time" periods that may be used to play with the Playbox, within a less constraining framework concerning schedule except at lunchtime. The Playbox could be opened in the morning (8.30-9.30), used again at the end of the morning after the activity (11.30-12), then after lunch before the activity (1-2) and after the afternoon snack up until most children's departure (4.30-5.30). According to the weather but also according to priorities given to such and such activity/outing (and also undoubtedly a little bit according to the organisers' motivations), the Playbox was opened between three or four hours a day, which contrasts with the relatively reduced duration at Anselme.

Moreover, storage at the end of each period is unnecessary as—except on very rare occasions—the playground is at the entire disposal of the leisure centre. The initial system was thereby modified as storage was ruled to take place only at the end of the day instead of after each game period. But obviously this adjustment does not go without managing difficulties over a long playing session. Thus, children who could not have obtained objects at the opening of the Playbox could not obtain them in the remaining play time, as the Playbox rule was that whoever took an object could hang on to it for as long as they wished. So, the lack of regular storage did not allow the "*reset*" observed at Anselme which regularly clears the (property) timers and reopens the game of "Catch them all" or of accumulation… but also the discovery of objects that could be recovered by the children among those which remained available. So, for want of "*reset*" objects may have been taken as their own, or even monopolized by children, and all the more so as the organisers did not try to find a way to compensate this want. The phenomenon is even increased by the meals organisation. At Anselme the fact that the students have to take their meals in turn allows a regular rhythm of giving up objects that can be reclaimed by other children present in the playground or coming out of the canteen. Whereas at Tilleul, the collective school meal—as well as the activities organised for all the children—do not give the children a chance to leave, or reclaim objects during the allocated time. Moreover, whereas Anselme has an offer of other workshops in parallel (drawing, library, toy library), the leisure centre at Tilleul gathered all the children in the playground without any other offer. The children who did not "catch on" the Playbox, partly owing to that difficulty of access to the objects, then resorted to the usual, or indeed ritual, ball games including football.

This increase in the opening time of the Playbox together with a smaller number of children and a more limited diversity of the objects seemed to result in what may sometimes have appeared as a certain loss of activity. This seems corroborated by the less regular rhythm of the Anselme Playbox when it was opened during leisure centre time on Wednesday afternoons as one free activity among an offer of different activities or outings. Lengthy period and low number of children seem to deeply modify the Playbox logic and should require consideration in view to suggest adjustments. The observed practices show that considering the amount of free time available during the day or indeed the week, as opposed to school context, playing possibilities can be increased, particularly by combining construction and symbolic game. Yet playing material (in number and diversity) and most of all accompaniment from the organisers must be adapted to that new way of playing. There cannot be any doubt that in this context the *playwork* model should fully play its role, in order to remedy the lack of support which was noted from the part of the organisers who did not try to facilitate and feed the children's play and constructions as much as could be considered.

Lastly, it seems that another less visible difference may play an important role: the presence of friends. At Anselme, and at school in general, children meet the friends with whom they will elaborate games during breaks. We could observe the stability of numerous groups of children, in particular within the same school level, and several of the older children were also to tell us that they had known their friends since the 1st or 2nd school year. These affinities and

the relationships with the opposed sex help building their stories and games which they do not share with anybody (Delalande, 2001). At the leisure centre, the children do not necessarily meet with their friends owing to its feeble attendance, but also to the fact that the children come from three different primary schools. Whereas some may rely on the presence of brothers or sisters, others have to cope with children they do not know, or know very little. Even though the organisers reckoned that the social mix between the different school origins was stronger, the children nearly always named their school friends as their favourite playing partners.

Therefore in addition to the culture gap between English approach and English practise (in particular where *playwork* is concerned) there is now a functional gap. Whereas between Anselme and the English system there is a culture gap, we find no functional gap owing to the near similarity of the lunchtime break on either side of the Channel. At Tilleul, the culture gap is still there, possibly even more crying because the implementation of *playwork* would have made it possible to solve some of the problems mentioned, yet not all of them. In addition there is an important functional gap concerning the number of children, the time duration and distribution dedicated to the Playbox, its connection with the other activities inasmuch as it is no longer class as opposed to recreation. There remains a need for reflection on the adjustment of the Playbox in the context of a leisure centre: which specific rules, which accompaniment, which duration? This would undoubtedly imply to reconsider the daily timetable bearing in mind the presence of the Playbox. What activities, or offers, in parallel or as a complement to the Playbox? It is also necessary to give thought to the adjustment of the contents and the quantity of objects depending both on the number of children and the amount of access time they are allowed.

6 – Prospects and conclusions from the French implementation

The educative question

The system is proposed as a means of enriching break time with new games offers. It does not appear as an educative system except if we refer to the myth of the educative play (Brougère, 2005). That seems to be a good point and it is important to keep the system clear of the "educativist" inflation of the child's leisure time (Brougère 2016a). The fact remains that in France the concept of leisure is saturated with speeches on education and the necessity of educational projects (Roucous, 2007); the Playbox will have to find its place against this strong background of educative prospect.

Yet, we would like to point to a paradox. On the one hand, both extra curricular structures must have an educational project, and do have a very general one about what is commonly called "socialisation". On the other hand, the organisers withdraw from whatever could be an educational role in favour of a supervising one. In a certain way, they showed some difficulty, indeed a refusal owing to a lack of time, to consider an (other) educational posture. As a matter of fact the suggestions of intervention made to them as for the PlayPod (intervention in case of risk by drawing the children's attention, methods of conflicts resolution) propose an educational action which they do not take up. This reduces the educational result of the process which refers back to the idea of an implication of the children in the definition of the legitimate practices.

One perceives, from the fact of the organisers' withdrawal, a lack of educational investment in the implementation of the system. All the same, is the system void of any educational interest? Certainly not, and when the organisers mention creativity and autonomy, or sharing, they point out an educational dimension. But because of the context of free time/recreation, it is an informal educational situation (Brougère, 2016b). Indeed, one can recognize learning

situations but they take place without the purpose of learning, as co-products of the playing situation (Brougère, 2005).

The most obvious one, and in conjunction with a whole lot of literature upon the subject, is that of the exploration of affordances. The child discovers the objects, their operational modes, their possible usages, and this exploration is a continuous learning process which goes on until the end of the period when one has even more new possibilities of action to discover.

Another learning process is linked to the importance of cooperation to realize constructions and scenarios too. This imply action coordination with others, and therefore a learning process of cooperation which is not always valued in the French school context.

One can also mention risk management. Moving from absolute prohibition to the enforcement of a general rule suggests a reflection process, certainly not always present, between the consequences of the action and this general rule.

Some mentioned creativity, but it refers back mainly to the exploration of affordances. It may be associated to problems solving, particularly in the case of constructions and assemblies. Then a trial an error learning process is being developed.

One may therefore consider that through the presence of objects that are different from the ones the children are usually confronted with, the Playbox system offers a diffuse education (Brougère, 2016b), education through environment, objects, and other children. The adults could take part in this diffuse or informal education but only do so marginally. The *playworker* can then be considered as an informal educator, whereas the French organiser hesitates between the absence of educational role (supervision, and letting things happen) and a formalisation of the educational role on a near school model through activities the educational targets of which will have precisely been defined (certainly very quickly forgotten in the heat of the moment).

Children's involvement

The Scrapstore PlayPod pedagogy implies requesting the children's involvement, seeking their advice, avoid imposing rules or limit the rules that one imposes. It is a question of allowing them a full participation in line with the International Convention of the Children's rights, too rarely taken into account in the French school context and hardly more in the organised leisure context. The Convention stipulates that one must seek the children's advice on everything that concerns them, which does not mean—as some pretend to believe—that their advice will systematically prevail, but at least that it will be known. Yet they are particularly concerned with recreation, leisure, and play. Furthermore the Scrapstore PlayPod is designed in a leading country in terms of legislation as well as the practice of taking children into account and children's participation (Clark & Moss, 2001).

Children's involvement is at the very heart of the principle of the proposed approach which consists in encouraging children to find their own solutions, but as we have seen, such an approach is far from being generalised. It is therefore necessary to reflect upon devices to be implemented so that the children may take part in the definition of the terms of use of the Playbox. Must one have a Playbox council, a lunchtime break or a leisure centre one, an extracurricular council? Must one use pre-existing devices that may not be well adapted or develop more informal processes? It is not for the researchers to say what should be convenient but it is up to each team to find out the best way in which they can involve the children. Such a recommendation may be in keeping with the will of some town councils, Paris included, to develop participative spaces with the children.

This logic of children's involvement has to be implemented in a general way. The adults must avoid wanting, for example, to regulate access to the objects, even though this issue is very present in France as well as in England. Thus, having to face the rush during experimentation related by Marc Armitage (2009), some schools initiated form by form shifts, making it

impossible for children from different forms to play together. An adult's logic was regulating a problem which very quickly happened to be solved by the children themselves in their playing dynamics (particularly through cooperation in the midst of groups) and the shifts were very quickly abandoned.

One of the main elements of the philosophy underlying the system leaves up to the children the choice of what they are going to do with the objects. It is important they should not receive them from the adults but that they should themselves find the objects even though the Playbox may be abandoned in favour of doing something else in case of disappointment (the Playbox is not intended to be the sole occupational offer in a playground). It is just as fundamental that they should try and regulate by themselves unequal distributions, which should not stop an adult to discuss it with them in order to help them find a solution. It is not a question of defining a type of children's involvement which would lead to establish rules on which one should not backtrack, but rather to endeavour to make of the dynamic of participating to the definition and reconfiguration of situations a constant element, which means to leave ample room for decision making in situation, in a mainly informal rather than formal way.

Objects before all

This analysis shows the importance of the object in the structuration of play. The absence of objects always entails a risk of transforming the playground into a recreational desert. The researchers associated here always had in view to emphasise the importance of the objects in order to understand the play, whatever object there may be. Play is a confrontation with culture, and for a significant part with material culture.

In the original concept, the child is confronted to separate elements (*loose parts*), recovered objects, which have therefore lost their function and original sense and allow the child to attribute them new functions and new significances that may vary according to the moment and the assemblies. These elements constitute the very basis of the system and grant it a specificity by comparison with other spaces available to the children for playing, which are organised around permanent facilities (playing areas, amusement parks) or playing objects that are finished and commercialized (toy libraries). Such an importance of the material together with its originality make it necessary to reflect upon the funds or stock about both its constitution and its management. Inspired from the English model, the selection aims at a certain diversity to enrich the playing possibilities. The Tilleul experiment shows the necessity to pay attention to the composition and quantity of each type of elements, in particular when the number of children is reduced. The distribution of the objects has to be thought about without remaining on a mere proportionality, as certain objects have to be paired, others grouped by larger numbers so as to offer the best potential.

Furthermore, the fact that the objects are recovered brings out a point to be clarified (ideally with the children) about deterioration. How can we integrate at the same time into the system both deterioration through usage (sometimes intensive given the solidity of the object) and

more or less intentional damage? When has a deteriorated or damaged object to be eliminated? Or to what extent may one consider that the object goes on with the recycling process because it is reusable in its damaged state? The renewal of the objects seeks partly to palliate those time effects by allowing a restocking of the damaged objects. But it is without doubt necessary to think of a better integration of this renewal within the "play cycle" as presented in the training course, by understanding it as a way of enriching the offer and giving it support in order to allow the play to vary and develop according to the experiences acquired by the children and the repertoire of practices that they build up.

Lastly the choice was made to systematically include in the Playbox finished objects fit for direct use in a near ready-made recreational function. This is the case for the pushchairs and even more so for the wheelchair. These are indeed the most problematic objects, the perceptible risk not being counterbalanced by a creative action as opposed to the kart made by assembly for instance.

We do not mean to criticize that choice which had positive effects where playing is concerned (in particular at Tilleul where they provided real momentum) but attracted a lot of criticisms. A reflection must be developed on this choice. Can such objects take their place in the basic configuration of the Playbox, or else must they not be options for teams likely to reflect on the place of wheeled objects in general in a playground (inasmuch as there may be other solutions)?

It obviously is important to engage a reflection upon all the possibilities of structuring children's play: beside the Playbox, what is the part played by elements of structure (configuration of the playground with fences, trees, etc.; play structures; spaces for sport) and other finished objects (balls, skipping ropes, wheeled objects, toys, board games, or construction games)? But also what place to be given to the child's objects? The Playbox centres the reflection on the object, but it implies a risk to obliterate a more general reflection on the playground objects if one should consider that the only legitimate objects are the Playbox's.

Localize

Appropriating the Playbox is giving it a local sense, proper to each *social setting*, which refers back to several dimensions.

It is essential for the box to be a project backed by a close-knit unanimous team. It can only be a team project and it is not advisable to install it without the support of the organisers teams (and even further) even if they are already formed. We saw clearly that the project had a much better support from the Anselme than from the Tilleul team. Appropriation is only possible on this condition.

It also means that adults and children give it a local sense linked to the general configuration of available activities within which the Playbox is integrated, but also to its taking root through the gradual construction of a legitimate repertoire of practices (for the children and the adults as well). Success is not linked to the fact that all the children would do the same things here or there, but on the contrary to the fact that the Playbox develops practices that differ (at least partly) according to each situation. The differences of conditions from one site to the other showed, beyond similarities, the construction of two very different repertoires. The legitimate repertoire of practices inventory may be considered as the local appropriation of the Playbox by a group of children and adults.

III. The Spanish research

1 – The site: La Lluna Infant School (Manresa, Barcelona)

La Lluna is an infant school belonging to the city town and managed by the *Encís* cooperative. This infant school has one group of students for each age group supervised ny a preschool teacher. The total number of students is 41 children that were distributed as follows during the 2015-2016 academic year:

- Infants (0- to 1-year-olds, P1), 1 girl and 7 boys
- Toddlers (1- to 2-year-olds, P2). 7 girls and 6 boys
- Older toddlers (2- to 3-year-olds, P3). 12 girls y 8 boys

The school's teaching philosophy is to improve the abilities of children with traditional toys as well as others produced from natural recycled materials. In Catalonia the use of materials recycled for education in general and, specifically, for playing is a very consolidated tradition. It is noteworthy that many recycled parts used for student playing materials are of natural origin (except for tires). In the project of this specific centre special care is given to the aesthetics of the objects used as well as of the spaces. This factor was extremely relevant in the implementation of the PlayPod, as we show later.
Time scheduling of this center is as follows:

- 9:00-9:30: Students arrival
During this slot, students freely play in classrooms.

- 9:30-10:30: indoor activities inside classrooms
During this slot, students take a second breakfast (Spanish *almuerzo*)

- 10:30-11:00: students go out to the schoolyard
During this slot, playing outdoors is encouraged and, occasionally, activities are directed that serve as a complement for the children's games.

- 11:00-12:00: indoor activities inside classrooms

- 12:00: Some families pick up their children for lunch at home. Students that remain at school take lunch there and then enjoy some time to rest.

- 15:00: Some families bring their children back to school (but not all families).

- 15:15-16:30: Directed and free activities are combined.

- 16:30-17:00: Families pick up their children from school.

This centre's timetable led us to implement the PlayPod before noon. It must be noted, though, that, except for entrance and exit hours, this schedule has some degree of flexibility. According to the educational team itself, it all depends on the development of the proposed activities and on the levels of acceptance, concentration, and distraction of the class.

2 – Methodology

During the preparation phase of the implementation, the team defined various research questions to guide our observations. These were rounded up with reflections proposed within discussion groups that included the team of educators.

Prior to the implementation meetings and interviews, both in group as well as individually with each educator, were conducted and taken notes of. They were asked to fill a questionnaire about their expectations regarding this project. Afterwards, a discussion group was held to debate the expectations about the PlayPod methodology. Photos were taken, both in class and at the schoolyard. About the students photos and videos were taken and more specific data were collected in a database (duration of games and its typology were taken into account, as well as the age and gender of participants, and the role played by the educators).

During the implementation hundreds of photos and dozens of videos were taken. The database continued to be fed with data in order to further specify the observation of the PlayPod implementation. It was agreed that educators had to take written notes every time they observed any relevant fact. An open communication channel (namely, email) was also established. Discussion group was usually held during group meetings after lunch. Written notes of these discussion groups were taken.

After the implementation Educators were observed again on a daily basis, especially with respect to the role they played both in class as at the schoolyard. Notes were taken of these observations. The educators were given a short questionnaire to answer as for assessing the differences between their expectations and their final perception about the project and a last group meeting was held as a wrap-up, in which general observations were collected. About the students another set of graphic material was taken as well as new databases specifying the types of games, duration, and differences regarding gender and age.

3 – Building the Spanish PlayPod

The *Encís* cooperative requested the opinion of the educators on the design of the device and was in charge of actually setting it up. When the PlayPod was brought into *La Lluna*, the size of it and its versatility were very much liked, but a negative aspect that was mentioned was its lack of use of materials that integrated the PlayPod more into the environment.

Regarding the objects available inside the PlayPod, it was difficult for the department of *Encís* in charge to collect the desired quantity of objects with optimum quality and functionality, despite the good predisposition of local businesses. The teaching team missed the variety and aesthetically-pleasing looks of the items that they were shown from the catalogue of the British project. It was noted that there was a great amount of objects (too many, as later became evident), but there lacked many of the ones that were considered in advance as possible items. In any case, potentially harmful materials were immediately discarded (unpolished wood pieces, wood strips and PVC tubes). Teachers also found that the material was not attractive and that there were many objects that were absolutely against centre's educational project

4 – Description of the implementation

Even though the terminology may be confuse, within the implementation of the PlayPod, the project stipulates an observation process prior to the implementation. This phase is necessary in order to recognize some critical aspects of the implementation beforehand; without these observations, it would be very difficult to have a previous framework of analysis. The third observation phase is done after retiring the PlayPod in order to register possible experimented changes.

Prior to the implementation
In preschool education, the role of education professionals is critical for the development of the students' personality. These professionals play the basic function of being affective role-models, as well as establishing patterns of behaviour, behavioural rules and observing that they are complied with. The team at *La Lluna* is capable of creating a calm and peaceful environment in classrooms that helps them a lot for performing their tasks. At the schoolyard they prefer to give students a certain degree of freedom, only intervening in cases in which conflicts arise or in which students themselves ask for it. They are conscious of the need that students must burn their energies when playing outdoors and consider that limiting it would be counterproductive for the development of the project in their classrooms.

The expectations towards the PlayPod project were quite high. These were represented in a diagram; only one educator expressed being more sceptical about the work environment and other pedagogical aspects. Regarding the increase of resources and materials, the whole team expressed high expectations towards this project.

Students of this age evolve from great emotional dependence towards greater autonomy. This can be observed very clearly at their different development stages.

Younger ones constantly demand for attention from the educators and almost do not interact at all with materials outdoors.

1- and 2-year-old students start to do many things by themselves and to take some decisions when playing, but still need to increasingly develop more autonomy.

Older students (2-, 3-year-old) already have total initiative in games and almost do not need any adult intervention when any conflict arises. A difference in leadership roles can also be observed regarding gender. While boys that are dominant are those who have physically developed earlier, there are 2 or 3 cases of girls that are absolute protagonist by means of persuasion and negotiation. Male leadership usually changes when disputed in any more or less violent fashion, whereas female leadership is reinforced even further when disputed. Leading girls in the group are much more subtle and practically minded; even techniques of elimination of conflict resolution consisting in avoiding the conflictive physical space can be observed.

The educators expected that the PlayPod offered something new to the students and the school, such as counting on new resources and materials that motivated children to further develop as a human being as well as contacts with businesses that could provide support for this material.

During the implementation
The implementation process took place between April and May 2016. On April 6th the children were shown the different materials from the PlayPod. From this date on, observations

were done both by the technicians on different days and by the educators themselves on a daily basis. This observation is documented with graphic materials (photos and video) and on written notes. Information was collected using a form. It also must be noted that bad weather forced us to delay the day for implementing the PlayPod.

The first day of implementation children had a look on the objects but did not start to play with them until an adult asked them to. Lots of instances of symbolic play were observed; objects being used for the purpose they were created for (office material, glasses, etc.). We observe cooperative games, conflicts (the novelty led to many disputes over scarce objects), experiments with sounds and textures, risk management. The educators discarded various objects seen as dangerous (e.g. wood strips, unpolished wood pieces, big plastic tubes, cans, …).

During the first days, notable moments of conflict and dispute arose because of objects of which less units were available. The types of games that were most common were manipulative and sensorial ones among younger students, and symbolic and cooperative games among older ones. For manipulative and experimental games plastic elements (tubes, pipes, cones, …) and coffee cans were mainly used. Students experimented with textures and sounds.

Various moments of heuristic games were observed, in which students did small creations putting different objects together.

Symbolic games with office materials (e.g. PC keyboards, mobile phones, coffee machine, etc.) were mainly developed by P1 students.

P3 students showed tendency towards cooperative games, using a great variety of materials, from cardboard tubes, plastic tubes and glasses, fabric, nets,… They took advantage of all of this to create more physical games, such as running in groups carrying over things in team; as well as other more symbolic and creative games, like representing a family assigning to each other a role in it, building a train wagon, or a small house using different materials.

The educators consider that the students need to burn their energies and they usually led them to do so by combining these games with the usual material they already know. Students frequently asked to use their usual toys (especially 1- to 2-year-old toddlers). It was observed a repetition in games with similar materials to those that they usually make use of. In the last days of the implementation, they were given access to their toys and it was observed that they started interacting with both types of materials.

The attention paid to the PlayPod material decreased as days passed. During the last days of the implementation only the most successful materials were left for them to use, but nevertheless students discarded most part of it.

The first impressions of the educators registered that the students did not interact with the materials if no adult invited them to do so. The little attractiveness of this material was noted, as well as the presence of potentially dangerous objects, and other objects that had to be thrown away as they broke very soon (e.g. cardboard objects).

Following the premise of not giving any instructions to the children, it was noted that the only ones that paid some attention to the PlayPod were the older students, older toddlers (2- and 3-year-olds). A positive change was observed in them: cooperative games increased among them.

1- and 2-year-old students, i.e. toddlers, still showed lack of autonomy; this was not improved after the implementation of the PlayPod. They interacted with the material in very isolated and specific ways, mainly by symbolic, heuristic (which increases creativity), and sensorial games.

In this group an increase of conflicts due to the use of material and space occurred (mainly fixed material and spaces located at the schoolyard that are not part of the PlayPod).

Infants (0- to 1-year-olds) almost did not use any element that they found strange. Their absolute lack of autonomy is evident.

In general, students interacted only with some elements, discarding the rest of them; the educators felt an intense sensation of disorder and precariousness because of this. From the

first day on the educators insisted in the difficulties that presented the PlayPod in order to collect and classify the material to put it back into the PlayPod's drawer. The fact that abandoned objects lied scattered all around the schoolyard made it difficult for them to burn energy. There lacked space. After the first days, the decision was taken to limit the amount of material and offer the objects in a more reasonable fashion.

Regarding risk management, the educators decided not to allow fighting games, due to the lack of control children show at these ages. It was decided that the main role of the teaching team was supervision, contaminating students' games as little as possible, except for specific moments with specific groups of students, which required more attention and guidance.

After the implementation

After the implementation stage finished, it was decided that the PlayPod container was kept in its original location, though covered, to observe the reaction of the children. None of them asked for the toys that they had been using for one month.

The children automatically turned back to their usual routine, not missing the objects of the PlayPod. They passed in front of it to get to the small hut where their usual toys are kept. It was really interesting that none of them asked for using those toys that had been their new toys for one month. The only student that came closer to the container was a girl that had a quick and furtive look from beneath the covering fabric. From that moment on, the PlayPod became an ignored object in the schoolyard.

The educators are grateful for the finalization of the project. They have not drawn many positive conclusions out of it. The only noteworthy thing is the increase of their consciousness regarding the perception of risks. They are more relaxed, more in control and it can be felt. Now they request the removal of the PlayPod container so that that portion of the schoolyard may be usable again.

Evaluation with the team of educators

At the beginning, when they went out to the schoolyard, the children were not aware that there was new material. The adults went to the container and only then the children came closer (to the educators, actually). The children had been playing so far, but without taking into account the new material (i.e. the material was irrelevant for them). The expectations were high about the success, but the material maybe was not the most adequate (the educators were looking for more natural material) neither was the presentation of the material, which was not classified. Difficulties were found to guide disorder before children had understood what order is. There were problems for collecting the excessive amount of material, in order not to saturate the children (half the material had to be retired). Some materials allowed for cooperative games (nets) and experiments (plastic cups). Younger children had to be told to play with the materials (contaminating the project). At the beginning, they took the material they knew and sometimes conflicts arose, contrary to what the PlayPod actually looks for. At their age they are not prepared yet to create anything from certain types of materials, and they need lots of interactions with adults.

It all depends on the patience that each child has for investigating. This is not due to the PlayPod itself, but each child's personality. The older students liked the PlayPod, but younger ones (P1) felt alienated and asked for the usual material. This is material that is designed for schoolyards that lack of any materials, and in this infant school there is plenty of them. The result is, therefore, a sum of different factors.

Regarding the perception of risk, some objects had to be retired, like wood strips that broke down and were dangerous, but no other incidents were considered worth of notice. Regarding mutual respect among students, no change was observed with respect to the usual educational program of the centre. Some materials (tubes) led to fighting games that students never did

before (e.g. simulating shootings using cones). These are behaviours that are common at some ages, that are conveyed through the material, but absolutely natural. The material was not diverse enough, felt old, broke repeatedly, felt like waste, and all of this made children not appreciate it. It would have been a great moment to arise awareness about the material, but it was not possible. Less but better material would have been much better, as well as improving the materials network.

It did not improve the centre's project. In fact, it went against it with respect to ethics and aesthetics. Some factors, such as tidiness at the schoolyard and encouraging this space for free play and students' leisure, negatively affected the teachers' perception and evaluation of the PlayPod implementation.

They would adapt the PlayPod (especially its materials), but they would not continue implementing is the way that is has been. They neither recommend it in similar locations without further redesign of the materials, even though they do recommend it in other environments.

4 – Conclusion from the Spanish implementation

The PlayPod in Catalonia has been implemented on a preschool population that is different to the ones on which PlayPods were implemented in Britain and in France. In these two countries (the UK and France), the PlayPod was implemented at primary schools, whereas in the case of Catalonia, the implementation was done at an infant school. Therefore, we have to emphasize that this project has been performed over a younger population (1- and 2-year-olds), which has its own specific needs and lacks autonomy. An important factor must also be taken into account: the height of the children (they are not tall enough). This may seem a trivial point, but we consider that it must be taken into account, as it limits the use of objects of the PlayPod, as we explain below.

The implementation in the Catalan context was also different regarding the educators team. In the British case, the PlayPod is "opened" during lunch time; this is done by staff that is not part of the educators team and the existing regulations do not specify any special positions for these types of tasks; this has prevented professionalizing the role of people who watch over these spaces. In the French case, the PlayPod was implemented in two different settings: at lunch time in a school, under the supervision of non-teaching staff (yet formally part of the school) and in a leisure centre during school holidays. In consequence, regarding the educational team, both in the British and in the French case, the adults that stayed with the children during this play time slot at noon were staff that regularly stays with them for lunch and, therefore, lack any specific training. In those cases, a training course were given to them prior to the PlayPod implementation that focused on the children's concept of playing, the relationship between accompanying and listening, the benefits of educational risk, etc. In the Catalan case, the professional team that applied the implementation was the same that is present during educational hours: a professional team trained and graduated in Preschool Education, so this training was not necessary at all. Therefore, other aspects were worked upon. The content of the syllabi of the different training courses was adapted to the specific needs of the Spanish team, due to the context and professionalization degree of the educators team. This training was deemed by the educators team as an opportunity for reflection and knowledge deepening.

We also have to remind ourselves of the importance of playing within the Catalan pedagogical context. For many years there exists a high consciousness towards recycling and material reuse in all educational contexts (both formal and informal). On the other hand, it is noteworthy that in many educational centre, as is the case of infant schools managed by

Encís, non-specific materials are used, as well as recycled, natural and daily materials, etc. A live, active pedagogy is developed, where the students are protagonists of their own learning. We want to stress out the following aspects observed from the implementation at *La Lluna* regarding how "usual practices" of children and teachers were transformed.

Children's practices

Given the fact that the schoolyard of this infant school is very rich in objects, the transformation of the space in this case was not that strong. The children occupied only one third of the outdoor space, surrounding the PlayPod. This space occupation factor may be influenced by the number of children.

Conditioned by the ages of the children, the first approximation to the PlayPod was done in a very progressive way. On the following days, once they acknowledge the novelty, the access to it became faster. Children of these ages first explore what they want to possess, so there did not race to seize the objects. Exchange and systematic hoarding were not observed either. No "artificial scarcity" of objects was either perceived due to the number of children and objects.

The development of object exploration ("affordance") arose with the majority of PlayPod objects. The children emulated elements related to music (blowing cones, drumming on cylindrical buckets, etc.). The use of different objects for one single purpose was done at a very basic level, though.

It was also observed how different situations of symbolic playing arose, especially with electronic devices (telephones, keyboards, mice, etc.). The collective dimension of playing that is associated to this development stage was not observed, though.

We would also like to emphasize that, due to the ages of participants, no feedback could be gathered from them regarding their experience with the PlayPod.

Professionals' practices:

It must be noted from the evaluation of the feedback of the PlayPod implementation at *La Lluna* that the *Encís* team emphasizes that this project has encouraged and helped developing discussion on:

- Materials that are the team of the educational centre uses to develop the curriculum.
- The question on opportunities of "affordances" that these materials offer.
- The limits that these materials are worked with.
- Risks accepted as educational and how the teaching team develops and takes positions regarding these risks.
- How to plan educational proposals with respect to materials, their typology, their aesthetics, etc.
- How is educational accompaniment done and what is the role of the teacher.

In other aspects, it is important to underline the positive evaluation of having encouraged a collaborative project at the school not just with children's families, but also involving the whole community around the school: public administration, associations, industries, businesses, etc. With the PlayPod implementation, the educational community was broadened from the community itself. Moreover, it raised the awareness towards different social agents of this environment by encouraging the use of recycled materials, giving a second use to them and transforming its initial use. It has engaged a circle of influence and learning: preschoolers-families-community-preschoolers.

Despite the differences, as we have explained here, of the PlayPod implementation in the Catalan context, we emphasize the pedagogical and educational experience in infant schools as the main contribution to the global project. This population and its associated educational space were never worked with at the PlayPod project.

The most relevant aspect regarding the context which this implementation worked with is the importance of spaces and materials as parts of an educational intention. "Schools must provide a rich environment such that entering into them is already an educational act itself" (Tonucci). These spaces for 0- to 3-year-olds must be:

- Flexible, adapted for the uses and functions children give them, prioritizing to their motivations and needs. This is the reason why it is better in an environment for children of these ages to work with less materials, more variety in types of materials (variety of objects, textures, etc.), and more variety in locations.
- Attractive: Materials, as well as spaces, must be attractive, as they must encourage exploration, experimentation, action, observation, relating, etc. This is why we suggest working from proposals, making materials available in provocative ways in order to observe the children's reactions.
- "Order" inspiring: Both spaces and materials must inspire a certain degree of harmony. Playing (learning) in a harmonious environment makes it easier for the children to develop their actions and helps everything to flow. Under these assumptions, order and aesthetics are close to this required harmony. At this educational stage, it is important to "care" for the materials.
- Diversity: Spaces and materials must be diverse enough to satisfy the needs of the curriculum as well as the motivations and interests of the students. This factor makes it possible to build a way of playing that is free, experimentation-based, that allows relating ideas with each other and developing plots, etc. It must be noted that the PlayPod adaptation was limited in diversity for this context: the materials were not suited for children of these ages and height. Additionally, the PlayPod could not be provided with diversity of textures and types of materials (wood, metal, fabric, thread, paper, cardboard, etc.).
- The role of the educator must be based on making easy to freely use materials and games, by influencing their disposition when inviting the children to interact with them (provoking them with the materials). This role model figure must stay with the children without intervening, mediating, or anticipating their action, thus allowing the children to ask themselves questions, make observations of their own, establish relationships between ideas, hypothesize, engage in conversations, etc. In this context it is important that the role model plays along by asking open questions and putting words on whatever that is happening.

Despite of us observing a very reduced sample (compared to other settings), it has been observed that not all children played with the proposed objects. At the recess many of them had the need to play in more physical ways: run, jump, etc. In many occasions, the children also asked to use the objects usual to their environment, especially those equipped with wheels: bikes, tricycles, etc. In such a context is very difficult to offer different, simultaneous activities.

IV. General conclusion

Even the two research in France and in Spain are different in the methods, in the concept and theory used and in the setting of implementation, we can propose some shared conclusion
The PlayPod and its implementation in the two countries is a tool for the reflexion about play, the space to develop play, play and leisure, play and education. The two researches show this. But it is more a situation to reflect about play and objects. What is a plaything? How an object can become a plaything for the children. In the different sites we can see also the importance of the box, the pod which is more than a container. It is a tool for the play and its architecture is essential. It is also part of the play, a kind of plaything.

The PlayPod offers play situations and a lot are similar in the different sites and countries: the importance of loose parts and objects for assembling, construction, interpretation (or symbolic play). We can underline the importance of cooperation.

The researches show the importance of the position of the adults (educators, teachers, organisers). How the adult can help the children in his or her play without organising directly the play? How we can transfer the playwork philosophy in different situations? How they manage the question of risk (knowing it is not the same before 3 years old)?

Except in one case (the primary school in Paris) we observe the implementation of PlayPod in situations which differ from the original concept. This need a work of adaptation after the experiment (we give some perspectives but there is still a work to find the good solutions).
The question of localization is central: even there is something very strong in the concept, it needs adaptation: cultural adaptation in connexion with the country and functional adaption in connexion with the institution and the age of children. It is important that there is an appropriation of the concept by a team, that's means a transformation of the team and the concept.

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