

# Play Pods in Schools

An independent evaluation (2006-2009)

Project 43

PLAYPEOPLE – *taking play seriously*

*Playground and Play Service Development, Education, Training & Research*

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## Introduction

Members of the Play Pod steering committee first approached me about making an independent evaluation of their project during the early planning stages in 2005. They felt that my experience of working in both the playwork sector and the primary school sector would allow for an independent evaluation that would fairly examine the project from both perspectives and provide an assessment that would be helpful to both. For my part I was curious about exactly what effect the introduction of loose parts in this form would have on playtime and lunchtime at school. Everything about the idea said it should work but to my knowledge there had been no previous in depth research into this topic. The project therefore was offering something very new.

Specifically, the brief asked for an evaluation that would:

- assess whether the project had met its outcomes as agreed with the BIG Lottery who were to fund the project (see Part 1 of this report), and
- assess the project in a broader and deeper sense producing a detailed, rigorous and scholarly evaluation that would be of use to both the schools sector and to playwork (see Part 2 of this report)

It was agreed that the evaluation would run parallel to the main project but would be independent of it and that there would be no direct contact with the project staff until the latter stages. The only exception to this would be if a particular issue was raised that was felt should be brought to the attention of the project team. Being able to shadow the project team over such a long period of time was both enjoyable and informative and I am sure that reading this report will show that the project not only lived up to early expectations but exceeded them. I can also add on a personal note that it has been a privilege to have been involved with this project and the project team throughout.

## Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank all the children and staff who took part in the evaluation, particularly those in the three detailed schools who gave up a significant amount of time to take part.

Thanks are also given to all the playworkers, managers and steering committee members of the Play Pods team who had to cope with a mysterious individual turning up from time to time to ask odd seeming questions. Your patience, particularly in the latter stages of preparing this report, has been greatly appreciated.

Marc Armitage  
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# Part 1

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## The Play Pods

Bristol Scrapstore, the lead organisation for the Play Pods project, planned to take three large shipping containers (of the type you might see being transported on the back of an articulated lorry) and convert them into what was effectively an enormous toy box. Wider access doors would be added to the side of each pod, storage units added to the inside and the whole thing painted a bright blue colour. The Play Pods were planned to be much more than simply a big box though; each would be loaded with a mix of junk materials donated from local business and collected as part of the Scrapstores normal routine of recycling scrap material to be used as play things. This included such things as cable rolls, bread trays, rope, thick cardboard tubes and old tyres, for example. In addition, the Pod itself was seen as providing a focus for the project in each school which involved not just the materials but also a training element for midday supervisors, mentoring, and contact and support for the schools teaching staff.

The three Play Pods would each spend twelve weeks in a school before being restocked and taken on to a further three schools. A total of nine schools were planned to benefit over the three years of the project (2006 to 2009) with three each being selected from the local authority areas of Bath and North East Somerset Council, Bristol City Council and South Gloucestershire Council. Funding for the project came from the BIG Lottery Playful Ideas Fund. For more details on what the Play Pods looked like and what materials they contained see the website of Bristol Scrapstore ([www.childrensscrapstore.co.uk](http://www.childrensscrapstore.co.uk)).

## Methodology

The independent evaluation was to have an input from all nine schools to be involved in the project. The first three schools to receive a Pod (one in each local authority area) would be studied as 'detailed schools' from which the bulk of the data would come. The remaining six schools would be studied in lesser detail and would help to test conclusions drawn in the more detailed schools. In the end, there were some adjustments that needed to be made to this plan as one of the schools identified to be amongst the first to take part actually received their Pod later in the sequence but by the time this decision had been taken the first part of the evaluation had already been carried out (for this reason there are four 'detailed schools' in this report). In addition, by the close of the evaluation only eight schools had been involved in the complete cycle of having had a Pod (and so there are only eight schools in total referred to in the report).

The independent evaluation was carried out in four stages:

- Stage 1: a mapping exercise, static observations of playtime/lunchtime, document review, and interviews with children and adults made before the Pods arrived at the school.
- Stage 2: more observations of playtime/lunchtime and interviews with children and staff made while the Pod was in place.

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Stage 3: a repeat of the above made around twelve weeks after the Pod had left the school.

Stage 4: a post-project questionnaire was sent out to the lesser detail schools and the headteacher and one other member of staff was interviewed after their Pod had left. The Play Pods project team and steering group members were also interviewed in this stage.

## Mapping Exercise & Static Observations

A working drawing was created and photographs taken of the grounds at each school showing what outdoor spaces and equipment the school had available for use at playtimes and lunchtimes. Static observations were then made of at least two playtime and two lunchtime periods to gain an idea of how the available spaces and equipment were organised and being used. The agenda for the earlier children and adults interviews was based largely on the results of this mapping and observations.

## Document Review

In each school a number of documents were reviewed as background research relating to playtimes/lunchtimes. These documents included the school incident and/or accident book, minutes of recent school council meetings, and any relevant policy documents relating to the playground and/or playtimes/lunchtimes. In practice this was usually a school behaviour policy. The incident/accident books (for all eight schools) were reviewed covering the whole school year before their Pod arrived, for the twelve weeks the Pod was present, and for twelve weeks after the Pod had left.

## Children's Interviews

Two interview groups of six children (three girls and three boys) were established at each school. One interview group was made up of children from Key Stage 1 (KS1, ages 5 - 7) and the other from Key Stage 2 (KS2, ages 8 - 11). The interviews, which were always held with the same children, took place in a private room free of interruptions and were recorded on mini-disc. A semi-structured interview was used with the same set of questions for each school. They were planned to last around 45 minutes but in practice tended to last much longer. The children's interview groups each met three times (once in each of Stages 1, 2 and 3 of the evaluation).

## Staff Interviews

A number of adults at each school were interviewed. In each case these were:

- The headteacher
- The Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO)
- Two class teachers
- One or two non-teaching assistants (NTA)
- At least two Midday Supervisory Assistants (MDSA) and in some cases all of them
- The school caretaker

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The interviews with the class teachers, NTAs and MDSAs were held as group/paired interviews; the remaining people were interviewed individually. The same staff were interviewed in Stage 1, 2 and 3 of the evaluation in a private room and the results recorded on mini-disc. A semi-structured interview was used with the same set of questions asked at each school. Each interview was planned to take 45 minutes but, as with the children's interviews, they often took much longer.

In addition to the above interviews, the headteacher and one other member of staff from each of the four lesser detailed schools was interviewed in Stage 4 of the evaluation. All members of the Play Pod project staff were also interviewed in this stage and most members of the steering group. The total number of people interviewed was 48 children and 43 adults which resulted in 67 hours of recorded material.

## Post-evaluation Questionnaire

In stage 4 of the evaluation a post-project questionnaire was issued to each of the four lesser detail schools with a request for a range of staff to complete and return them. A total of 32 staff responded: 11 class teachers, eight NTAs, six MDSAs (including one who also worked as an NTA), three playleaders/playworkers (working in the schools after-school provision), two headteachers, one learning mentor, and one SENCO.

## Consent and Confidentiality

Written consent forms were completed by the parents/guardians of all children taking part in the children's interviews and information on the project was sent out to all other parents/guardians and children in each school. The information included details of what the evaluation was for, how it would be carried out, what the children's involvement would be, and what form and to what purposes the research would be put. Photography consent and post-project use of images was also sought. As well as parents/guardians being asked to read through the information and give their consent to taking part they were also asked to read this with their children and ensure that they knew what was about to happen. In the case of the interview groups the consent form asked each child taking part to sign it too so as to indicate this had been done.

The children's interview groups were put together by the schools which were asked to select pairs of friends but not to worry about only selecting children they felt were more articulate than others. These children were all asked if they wanted to take part both at the beginning of the project and also before each of the evaluation interviews. On only two occasions during the evaluation did a child ask not to take part.

No names of individuals interviewed are given in this report and the names of the schools involved are given as School 1, School 2, etc.

## Limitations of the methodology

As mentioned above one of the schools that took part in Stage 1 of the evaluation did not receive their Pod in the first run of schools and so only took part in Stages 1 and 4. This increased the amount of qualitative information generated in Stage 1 but not to the extent



that it could not be managed. Timetabling and staff illness also meant that only two of the three SENCOs took part in Stage 3 interviews.

There was only one significant limitation on the methodology for the evaluation but this proved to be a very significant one. It was intended to produce a detailed quantitative analysis of the recorded accidents across all the evaluation schools (detailed and lesser detail) for a period before, during and after the Pods in each school. However, in practice this proved impossible to do. The amount of information this exercise generated was way above what was expected and it reached a point where it threatened to take away time from other elements of the evaluation. More significant, however, was the variety in recording method employed by each school. This made the collection and interpretation of the data very complicated. Enough detail was extracted to allow broad conclusions to be drawn but not with the degree of accuracy planned (this can be found at Appendix A).

## Meeting the Project Objectives

The independent evaluation on the Play Pods was tasked with assessing whether the project had met the objectives agreed upon with the principle funder, the BIG Lottery. There were eight objectives to achieve which the evaluation was to assess as being 'not met', 'met', or 'substantially met'. The evaluation has concluded that all objectives were met, three of them substantially.

Objective	Met or Not
To enable children to experience richer play opportunities within the school day	Objective substantially met
To improve children's participation, decision making skills and their control of play within school settings	Objective substantially met
To improve access for all children to inclusive play opportunities	Objective met
To raise awareness of the value of play within the schools and their extended communities	Objective substantially met
To meet unitary authority play policy/strategy objectives to promote the importance of quality play opportunities within formal settings	Objective met
Improve the ECM outcomes for children	Objective met-
To enable schools to take independent ownership and continue the principles of the project after the project ends	Objective met
To provide an evidence based assessment of the impact of good loose parts play on school learning opportunities	Objective met

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## Richer play experiences

All four of the detailed evaluation schools already had examples of fixed play equipment (meaning large fixed play features such as swings, climbing frames, etc.) in the school grounds before the Play Pods project began as did one of the lesser detail schools. One of the schools without any fixed play equipment had already planned to add something before joining the project but their experience of having a Pod influenced their plans and led to some changes being enacted.

All eight schools provided loose equipment for play to varying degrees: access to footballs and to bats and smaller balls was common; a number of the schools made drawing and reading materials available, and some provided board games for use outside. It was the younger children in the schools (KS1) that tended to have access to the most extensive play things: wheeled toys such as scooters and trolleys, things for digging with and manufactured toys were seen as being more relevant for this younger age group than the older. The richness of available play experiences was undoubtedly met by the inclusion of the Pods and the loose parts it contained. But equally as important the focus of the Pod led all of the schools to consider what play opportunities they were already providing and got them thinking about extending further.

## Participation, decision making and children's control

Some of the most significant comments made during the evaluation related to these three elements and in the final round of interviews it is these effects that proved to be amongst the most significant in the minds of many the class teachers particularly. The evaluation concluded that this objective was met substantially (see Part 2 of this report for more details).

## Inclusive play

The number of children in the evaluation schools with some form of physical or learning disability was few. Where this was the case none of the schools placed restrictions on children having access to the Pod however at one school a wheelchair user could not directly access the inside of the Pod and so tended to have things brought out by other children. It was clear that the SENCO in each of the detailed evaluation schools were very clear about inclusion having a broad meaning, particularly inclusion for children they considered to have issues in socialising with others; they felt that the Pods were generally accessible and they meant this in the broadest sense possible.

## Raising awareness of play

Undoubtedly one of the great successes of the project has been the degree of debate that has been generated by the presence of a Pod. The training element of the project resulted in very positive comments from the midday supervisors involved and there were members of the teaching staff who felt that this training should have been available to them too; but even without access to training, the presence of playworkers supporting the initial stages of a Pod in use, and teachers seeing what their children were doing with it opened peoples eyes to an understanding of play that was not present before.

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## Local Authority Expectations & Play Strategies

All three of the local authorities involved in the project had play strategies in place before the project began or shortly afterwards all of which raised the issue of play in the school environment. The three local play officers therefore had expectations of the Play Pods that related to developing this topic and to gathering evidence on the role of play and loose parts in meeting their goals and establishing or strengthening their involvement in play at school.

The local authority play officers (Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol and South Gloucestershire) all felt that the results of the project had more than satisfied their desired outcomes and had given them a way in to future developments in schools. One said, "This, extended services and play in the early years is all part of school improvement" (play officer). A second said, "I wanted them to see loose parts in action and understand the theory. And they have" (play officer). The third agreed, adding "I wanted schools to understand 'play' and provide better opportunities [for play]" (play officer).

## Every Child Matters and Inspections

There were no mentions made of the Every Child Matters (ECM) Framework or the Outcomes during any of the interviews with school staff in the evaluation (but it was touched on briefly in one of the post-project evaluation returns). However the project clearly met a number of the ECM outcomes by which schools in England have been inspected since September 2005. One of the local authority play officers on the steering committee said that, "There was a debate about play in ECM at the time [of planning the project] and I felt that 'play' could contribute to those outcomes but 'playwork' wasn't been given a platform or credit [by the local council]" (play officer).

This had clearly not been picked up by the schools in the project by the end of the evaluation but a number were beginning to realise the potential link between providing greater play opportunities and the ECM Framework, particularly two schools that had received Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) Inspections whilst they had a Pod in place. In both cases the Pod was favourably mentioned in their Inspection Report. One for example said the Pod had, "made a positive contribution to the whole school".

For a full discussion on the role of play in contributing to school inspection and the ECM Framework see the section on Schools and Hospitals in the document *Every Child Plays: a play response to the Every Child Matters Outcomes* (Armitage 2006) details in the Bibliography.

## Schools independent ownership

All three detailed schools in the evaluation had begun to discuss internally how they could continue the best elements of the project once their Pod had left within just a few weeks of their first use, and amongst all the schools that took part in the project a number had made active steps to either buy a Pod or to make an alternative but similar provision in the form of access to junk materials. At the end of the evaluation Bristol Scrapstore had begun to engage with the schools to develop this but it is significant that the schools themselves were taking an active role in this.

# Part 2

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## The Results

### Before the Pods Arrived

#### Purpose of Playtimes & Lunchtimes

1. In the adult interviews one of the earliest questions asked of interviewees was about the start and finish times, and the length of time allocated to their playtime. When asked this the Headteacher at School 1 (S1) jokily said, “I hope everyone [else] gives the same times for playtime!” Only those interviewed at School 4 (S4) actually did: at Schools 1, 2 and 3 (S1, S2 and S3) there were varying start and finish times given and sometimes differing lengths of time were quoted as being allocated to this part of the school day as well. Two of the schools, S2 and S4, both allocated 15 minutes for playtime with S1 and S3 allocating 20 minutes; S2 and S3 also had separate playtime periods for KS1 and KS2 children. At S3 the reason for this was said to be a lack of space as the school has a single playground but at S2, which has two separate playgrounds, the reason was more about general organisation of the school day and class times. Most of those interviewed referred to this period as ‘breaktime’ rather than ‘playtime’.
2. None of those in the adult interviews knew what the current education regulations say about playtime. Some thought it was when it is and for the time it is for historical reasons but the main reason people gave for its current organisation was to do with the curriculum. For example, amongst teaching staff one said, “It is 15 minutes so that it fits with curriculum time” (teacher, S4) another said “So as to fit lessons in” (NTA, S4) and one headteacher said, “I think it has to be 20 minutes because of curriculum time” (S1). Most felt that the length of playtimes were restricted by outside agencies or were set in regulations relating to curriculum time. Almost all were surprised to learn that although there are regulations relating to time spent teaching the curriculum there are no regulations relating to the timing or length of playtimes, or even if there should be one or not. Nor are there regulations relating to the start time and finish of the school day. There was less confusion over the length and timings of the lunchtime period but most seemed to see playtime and lunchtime as one and the same thing.
3. When asked what they felt the purpose of playtime and lunchtime was the most frequent answer given related to developing ‘social skills/social bonding/building social relationships’ (12 mentions); ‘letting off steam’ (10 mentions); ‘having a break from the classroom’ (9 mentions) and; ‘getting some fresh air’ (8 mentions). Spending time with friends was mentioned specifically seven times (this is included in figures for ‘social skills/etc’ above). Playtime as a time for teachers to have a break and/or time to prepare lessons was mentioned four times. ‘Play’ and ‘playing’ was mentioned twice.
4. Despite the few mentions of play and playing most felt that playtime was ‘different’ to class time and saw any possible social aspects as important. One teacher said playtimes were important because they gave an opportunity for children, “To

interact socially in a way they cannot in the classroom.” (teacher, S4). The element of free-choice was also mentioned, “There are less (sic) boundaries at playtime, they can choose what they want to do ... [but] it’s all a part of education.” (headteacher, S4). This was one of a number of comments made about the broad possibilities that playtime and lunchtime might provide, almost exclusively by headteachers. One other said for example, “The tradition [of playtime] seems to be about fresh air, but I see it as much more than that.” (headteacher, S3). A third headteacher listed improving social skills, relationships, being non-directed, managing time, playing, making choices and resolving conflict as important reasons for playtimes adding, “It’s a very important time of the day.” (headteacher, S1’).

### Summary

There was some confusion in peoples understanding of the organisation of playtimes and lunchtime at their school and none of the adults interviewed knew what the current education regulations say about this part of the school day.

When asked what they felt was the purpose of playtime answers included developing social skills and letting off steam but ‘play’ and ‘playing’ was rarely mentioned. However, most felt that playtimes and lunchtimes were an important time of the day which was ‘different’ to class time. Some, particularly headteachers, also felt that playtimes and lunchtimes offered possibilities that were not currently being met.

## What happens at Playtime and Lunchtime: the Adult View

5. Most comments made about what happens at playtimes and lunchtimes were problem based and lunchtime was seen as more of a problem time than playtimes. “It’s much too long because a lot find it very difficult. Too much unstructured, unsupervised time. Key Stage 1 and 2 might have different problems but it’s [lunchtime] when the problems occur.” (headteacher, S2). Another said, “The last ten minutes of play is were the incidents are. It’s probably the most difficult time for our children because they have to deal with their own problems and make their own decisions. A few of our children find that hard.” (headteacher, S1).
6. Very few comments were made about what children actually played. Most believed that running around and playing football was the most frequent activity of playtimes and lunchtimes. The use, or more often misuse, of playthings such as balls, skipping ropes, hoops, etc., was felt to be possibly as common as running around. There was also a general feeling of a lack of imaginative play and sometimes this was related to the way in which children made use of available playthings, or not. The comments of a class teacher at S7 were common, “if there is any imaginative play it tends not be with [things]”.

7. Many felt that without adult involvement the situation might be even poorer. The head at S2 said that playtime was about building social relationships, which they do, "But not as well as could be if we had more money for adults to help them." For example, "Some will just sit there or stand still, but not if Huff and Puff [a local authority sponsored, adult led activity programme] is on." (teacher, S2). Huff and puff was mentioned a number of times with one saying that, "It's for children that find playtimes hard. It's about interaction and practicing PE and coordination." (teacher and PE coordinator, S2). Even without this organised scheme adult involvement was felt necessary, "We try to get them playing" said a midday supervisor (MDSA, S3).
8. Adult intervention was often seen as more important at KS2 than at KS1, "The Key Stage 1 children are using their imagination [but not Key Stage 2] ... they just start fighting play fighting (sic). We've had people hurt so we had to stop it." But adult interaction at KS2 was seen by some to have only limited success. Two midday supervisors said, "We had a slide show about games [to play] in corners. We tried stuff but it did not last long. It seemed to fizzle out." (MDSA, S4). They were both referring to Huff and Puff.

### Summary

Most adults felt there was a little in the way of imaginative play on their playgrounds and that playtimes and lunchtimes were often a time of 'problems'. Some felt that their children struggled with the unstructured nature of playtimes and many believed that their children either needed adult involvement at playtime or that improvements would only come about with adult involvement.

9. During the adult interviews, the question, 'if we asked the children at your school what they felt playtime is for, what would they say?' was asked. This question caused a lot of thought. This answer was typical, "I'm not really sure". (teacher, S3). Most who answered this question thought that meeting friends would be important to their children (5 mentions). Other comments included, 'To play football' (3 mentions); 'have fun (2 mentions); 'To run around and let off steam' (2 mentions); and have 'a beak' (2 mentions). One felt that a chance to meet with friends at playtime was very important as a way of dealing with the stresses of life, saying, "They need, time to spend with friends. They can't talk about home life with friends during class. They need a chance to be themselves, and to be able to deal with their worries." (NTA, S4).
10. At this point only two comments about negative feelings were made. One midday supervisor felt that girls would say, "There is not much for girls to do." (MDSA, S2). One said, "They would probably mention bullying." (headteacher, S2).
11. Asked if they had ever read any material about play and playing, five mentioned having read material from Huff and Puff (two headteachers, one class teacher and

two midday supervisors). When asked what they remembered from this material all five mentioned games that could be played on the playground but none could remember reading anything that related to the role or purpose of play at playtime or anything about playing that was not rule-based. In answering this question others mentioned having read material on 'circus skills' (teacher, S2); managing playground behaviour (headteacher, S4); and one had completed a Take 5 for Play course (teacher, S1). With the exception of the latter person no one had read any material that was about play and playing generally or any playwork related material.

### Summary

When asked what they felt children at their school thought playtimes and lunchtimes were for most said that friends, football and letting of steam would be the most common answers. Few adults had read any literature relating to play and playing or playwork.

## Early thoughts about the Pods

12. At the time of the first evaluation visits the Play Pod project was at an early stage and few staff in schools had been given much information about the Pods and how they would work. In the adult interviews all were asked what they thought would actually be in the Pod. Almost everyone felt they had a clear idea of what this would be. The vast majority thought it would be additional sports type equipment, such as, "Soft balls, hoops and skipping ropes." (MDSA, S2). Others thought it might contain, "Big games." (MDSA, S3); "Possibly games they can play together." (teacher, S2); and "Board games." (MDSA, S1). Others were a little more vague, "Equipment to provide stimulation?" (teacher, S2); "Something different to what we have now." (teacher, S3) and "Bits and pieces." (teacher, S1).
13. Some thought whatever materials it contained there would be a degree of organisation involved in its use. One said it might include, "Physical play cards showing 'how to play' things." (SENCO, S2) and a number thought that there would need to be monitors or some kind of adult involvement in order for children to get the most from it. One person interviewed had previous experience of scrapstore type materials and although she had not been told what was going to be in the Pod said she could guess. However, she had concerns about this and also felt that some organisation would be necessary. "It's quite hard to envisage [how it's going to be used]. Scrapstore is a bit chaotic [meaning the materials] ... They will have to be showed how to play with it properly. Maybe the school council could do this." (teacher, S1).
14. The headteachers at each school all had a much clearer idea of what the Pods would contain as all had either attended meetings about the project or had already



been visited by Play Pod staff. All the headteachers also concentrated their answers more on what the materials in the Pod would enable children to do rather than on defining what the materials would actually be. For example, "I hope it will be something much more than just 'hoops'. I want something that adds a different dimension to play." (headteacher, S1); "Something more in it for children to 'do'. A context in which to learn social relationships." (headteacher, S2); "Something that is more cooperative and less confrontational." (headteacher, S4).

15. Two headteachers mentioned that they also saw the Pod as an opportunity for staff development, "I'm looking forward to the training aspect, raising the profile of play amongst the midday supervisors." (headteacher, S3); and "I see it as developing staff to understand play, not to lead it." (headteacher, S1). However, both these headteachers were talking about staff development in terms of midday supervisors. The possibilities for teaching staff were not mentioned in this context.
16. When asked what they felt the benefits of having a Pod might be most people other than the headteachers were less sure in their answers. Two felt it might be good to use the Pod as a 'reward' for good behaviour (teacher, S3 & MDSA, S4) and one hoped it would, "Keep them amused" (MDSA, S3). Most of the midday supervisors felt it would add more fun to play times and might lead to less arguing whereas most of the teachers felt it would lead to "More collaboration, skills development, imagination." (teacher, S1') (5 mentions). One headteacher also added, "I hope older children will help younger children to play." (S2).

### Summary

Most adults thought that the Pod would contain equipment with which they were already familiar, such as hoops and skipping ropes. Some also thought it might contain games that children could play together such as board games and might include cards showing 'things to do'.

Headteachers at the schools hoped the Pods would provide more than this and based their answers more on what they hoped the Pods would allow children to 'do' rather than the equipment in it. The headteachers at each school had by this stage more contact with the project and the project team than other adults in the school.

17. Some also saw a direct opportunity for children to actually play, and a number felt this was something their children could not do anymore. "[I see this as] an opportunity to play because children do not have the opportunity to play anymore, I suspect because of TV. When they come into reception they don't seem to know how to play. They play on the computer more." (teacher, S1'). Another said, "This will take them back to when we were children." (NTA, S4).

18. There were very few mentions made of possible benefits that might be relevant to the classroom or for teaching. Developing problem solving skills was mentioned by some class teachers and possible benefits from increased cooperation but people seemed cautious about the possibility of such benefits and did not make a link between this happening outside with the Pod and their classroom. Almost all teachers and headteachers, though, felt that increases in imagination would be beneficial for classroom teaching and many felt that a current lack of imagination in play was of particular concern. For example, “Some 5 – 7 year olds have little idea of imaginative play.” (teacher, S2).

### Summary

Some adults felt that having the Pods might help their children play, which many felt was something they found difficult to do. However, few mentioned any possible benefits the Pod might have to the classroom or to teaching.

### Early Concerns

19. People were asked in the adult interviews if they had any particular concerns relating to the Pod. Concern over ‘supervision’ was mentioned by most midday supervisors and some others. For example, one said there would need to be ‘a lot’ of supervision for the Pod to be safe (MDSA, S2) and another, concerned about additional work, said, “We don’t have enough staff to supervise [the Pod as well as everything else].” (MDSA, S3). One of the teachers said, “There would have to be special training [for the midday supervisors].” (teacher, S1) and at least one headteacher was concerned about pressure on supervision, saying “Possible demand may stress people out.” (headteacher, S3). Concerns mentioned by members of the teaching staff generally revolved around how the midday supervisor staff would cope.
20. Packing away materials after use was also a concern to some, and not just to midday supervisors (4 mentions). This was partly related to concerns that there needed to be a lot of materials available for everyone to benefit, “There needs to be the right amount of stuff.” (MDSA, S1). Some felt that there also needed to be some kind of rota to make sure that everyone got access to the Pod (3 mentions), “There needs to be a rota so that all get a go.” (MDSA, S1) but others felt this would be less effective, “We tried a rota with toys once but it didn’t work.” (MDSA, S4). This need for a rota seemed to be connected to previous experiences, particularly with fixed play equipment (meaning such things as climbing frames and swings) as all four schools in this stage of the evaluation had some kind of fixed play equipment in the school grounds and two provided access to this on a rota basis (S2 & S4). At the latter school the headteacher felt that maybe this rota should be extended to the use of the Pod too but the observation sessions showed that in practice the rota on the fixed play equipment was not actually operating at either of these schools.

21. Two mentions were made about girl's access to the Pod specifically, for example "Will there be stuff for girls? Building is more for boys." (MDSA, S2). The only specific comments about boys related to football and this included two comments that the Pod should not interfere with boys playing football or this might result in problems (S1 & S4). The possibility of vandalism after school hours to the Pod received two mentions (S1 & S2) but in neither case was this comment from a caretaker who might be felt to be the key person in this context (one was from a headteacher the other a SENCO). One group of midday supervisors was concerned about things getting broken during use though and both asked what they should do if this happened. (MDSA, S1).

### Summary

Adults expressed some concerns over the arrival of the Pods, mainly over supervision and the packing away of materials at the end of a session. Some were also concerned about the possibilities of boys dominating the equipment found in the Pod.

22. The biggest cause of concern was over safety (8 mentions). Comments varied from the subtle, "Is it going to be safe?" (MDSA, S1) to a list of genuine concerns and comments such as, "Nets? We don't want nets. People will get tangled up in nets. We'll have broken bones!" (MDSA, S2). Not all comments relating to safety related to directly to children though. A caretaker at one school said, "It will have to be safe for parents concerns" (caretaker, S4) but mentioned this at the very end of a positive list of effects he expected to see from the Pod; and a headteacher said, "My concern would be health and safety. Trapped fingers, choking" but then went on to say, "[But] If we take away all risk, children will never learn anything." (S2).
23. The group that expressed the greatest number of concerns in the adult interviews were midday supervisors and their concerns were varied. Fewer concerns were expressed at S4 compared to the other schools where, when asked about potential problems, one midday supervisor said, "[We will see] Nothing that you don't already face everyday. Children have their little disputes." Amongst the teachers, headteachers and non-teaching assistants, the main concern related to the free-play nature of loose parts. One said, "[I'm worried about] Taking away the rules, taking away the 'this is what I want you to do'. It's about exploring, [but exploring] their games not ours." (teacher, S2). There was further concern about the apparent lack of structure that was being asked for with the use of the Pods. Without teacher involvement it was felt that some children might dominate and others would loose out. As another teacher at the same school said, "As teachers we would structure things ..." (teacher, S2) and this was seen in part as one way of ensuring fairness.

### Summary

The greatest concern people had was over safety and the possibility of accidents, and disputes leading from unwanted behaviour. Midday supervisors expressed these concerns the most. Teachers were more concerned about a possible lack of structure and 'rules'.

## Children's voices

### What's happening: Observations and Audit

24. The evaluation process included the making of a baseline assessment of what was happening during playtimes and lunchtimes at each of the four schools visited during Stage 1 of the process. This involved making a physical inspection of the school grounds without children present to look for signs of what and where different types of play were taking place. This was then followed up by a series of observations made during a number of playtimes and lunchtimes, particularly focussing on what was identified during the physical inspection. The main aim of these two approaches was to influence the agenda and discussion points for interviews with both children and adults at each school. In the case of the children's interviews, each session concluded with the group leading a walkabout session of the school grounds which provided an opportunity to extend some of the indoor discussion and ask specific questions about particular spaces and features.

### Moving Play

25. Play involving movement (running or walking) was observed in all four schools during the playtime and lunchtime observations. At any one time at least a quarter of all those on the playground were moving around playing ball games, playing other games involving running (particularly chasing games), or walking around with friends. During playtimes the proportion of people moving around remained similar throughout the whole playtime period but in all four schools moving around gradually decreased towards the end of the lunchtime period.
26. S1 and S3 both had enclosed areas set aside for ball games, mainly football used on a class rota, but football was being played somewhere at all four schools. At S1, S2 and S3 there was a ban in place on playing football on the main playground. Despite this however, football was seen being played on the playground at all three of these schools and during each of the observations. The proportion of people playing football varied from school to school and during different observations (in part due to the rota system in place at some schools) but was rarely more than around a dozen people at any one time but the number of people playing football was largely consistent through all observations and it was generally the same people with some saying they played more or less every day

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and for the whole of lunchtime. Girls were observed playing football at only one school and only once.

27. All four schools had some form of play equipment available for use at playtime and/or lunchtime, including skipping ropes, small balls and in some schools other materials such as beanbags and hoops. At S2 such equipment was only available to children in Key Stage 1.
28. Various chasing games were observed and 'safe' areas (specific places where a player cannot be caught) were observed in use at S1 and S2. Interviews with children at S3 and S4 showed that they too had declared and agreed safe areas for chasing games. These safe areas, referred to by children in all four schools as 'base', were defined and agreed on by children without reference to adults. *British Bulldog*, a game often subjected to a playtime ban in schools across the country, was said to be 'not allowed' by staff at three of the schools and children at the fourth said that they had also been told not to play it. However, the game was observed being played at all four schools on a number of occasions.

### Sitting Play

29. Play taking place sat down (including playing with 'things' and talking to friends) was observed at all four schools. During lunchtimes at S1, S2 and S3 at least twice as many people were seen sitting and standing still as were moving around. At S2, the school with the least in terms of fixed play equipment, sitting play was the most observed form of play during lunchtimes but at all four schools the numbers seen sitting and standing still increased gradually as lunchtime progressed.
30. Despite all four schools having 'things' that could be played with while moving (balls, ropes, etc.), only S4 had equipment regularly available that could be played with sat down such as reading materials, paper, pens and board games for example but children at S1 said they sometimes had reading and drawing materials for use during lunchtime. On a few occasions children were seen to be playing with toys that had been brought from home (mainly soft toys and toy cars) but in all four schools this was said to be either banned or actively discouraged.
31. The most common activity observed taking place sat down was simply talking and/or playing in corners (mainly corners involving walls or doorways). This was true at all four schools but much less so at S2 which had a more exposed playing area than the other schools and fewer corners and nooks and crannies. S1, S3 and S4 had sheltered spaces deliberately provided for playing in and in all three schools these spaces were used frequently for talking and playing with things.

### Big Play

32. Play involving big physical movement (climbing, sliding, balancing and swinging) was observed at all four schools. All four had some form of fixed climbing equipment in place but this varied in quantity and quality. Although it was said at

all four schools that there was some form of rota or limitation on numbers that could use big play equipment at any one time this was observed being enforced at only one school and on only one occasion (S2). At S4 (the school with the most extensive fixed play equipment) it was this form of play that engaged the majority of children during all the lunchtime periods observed. At S2 (the school with the least fixed play equipment and the most restrictions on its use) children were rarely seen playing on it and few mentions were made of it during the children's interviews. The comments that were made were often negative, such as "its way too small", for example.

33. Children at S1, S3 and S4 all said that the play equipment was popular (children had adopted a special name for the big equipment area at all three, a key sign of popularity) but the area also proved popular for other forms of play too. For example, gathering and sitting on or under play equipment was mentioned and observed at all three schools. At S3 it was said that "Everybody uses it for 'touch' [chase games]"; and at S1, S3 and S4 combining big play with pretend play was also observed and often mentioned during interviews (see below). Despite the existence of fixed play equipment in all four schools, climbing (and sometimes swinging) was also observed in all on other features other than the equipment. This included fencing, drain pipes and benches. At one school, numerous children were seen to climb and play in one particular set of trees during every observation session.

### Garden Type Play

34. Play involving natural materials (grass, twigs, stones, berries, bark, etc) and landscaping (slopes and mounds) was observed at all four schools. As the first series of observations were being made early in the calendar year access to the school field (all four schools had a field) was restricted so there were few observations of garden type play seen. However, mentions of it were frequent during interviews at all four schools and at one school (S4) this form of play was the most often mentioned (the most common 'favourite place' identified by children at this school was also one particularly shady spot behind some trees that was said to be good for sitting in and also for 'collecting').
35. Some examples of garden play were seen however and these included children digging in the base of bushes (S1 and S2); exploring behind hedges and picking berries (S1); mixing water and mud (S1 and S4); and in all four schools gathering and collating materials such as twigs and berries. Regularly used digging holes were also found at all four schools.

### Pretend Play

36. Play involving story-line and characterisation was observed at all four schools and amongst all age groups. In most cases examples of this type of play were seen linked to a specific feature or area of the school grounds such as in a corner, on a piece of fixed play equipment, and at one school (S1) in and around a play house. At S1 younger children were often seen gathering bark, leaves and berries and

placing them in what they said in later interviews was the “cooker” which was a square shaped gap in an outer boundary wall produced by a number of missing bricks. Some children said, “You can make people into evil villains” by doing this too. At S1, S2 and S4 a number of children pointed out a place at each school that was referred to as the “house” and pretend play was seen in each of those spaces a number of times during observations. In all these cases this was simply a space that they considered to be a ‘house’ rather than it being any kind of provided play house.

37. Pretend play involving monsters and frightening characters was observed at all four schools, and this often involved being chased to or from a specific and regular feature such as behind a garden shed (S1) and behind a set of bushes (S2). Most pretend play observed involved chasing in some way and a significant amount also involved natural materials such as leaves, bark and, in one case, water. Pretend play was also often linked to simultaneous use of fixed play equipment.

### Music and Word Play

38. Play involving songs, dances and language was observed at all four schools. In many cases this was in the form of pairs or groups of friends talking. Very few instances of solitary children were seen (and never more than two or three at any one time). Regular dances and made-up shows were observed in a consistent location at S3 and S4, and handclapping games were seen often at S1 and S3. Rhymes and songs used during skipping were also seen and heard at S3 and S4.
39. Play strategies, such as ‘counting out’ (a method of choosing who will be ‘it’ or ‘on it’ by eliminating a group of players by hands or feet) was observed at all four schools amongst Key Stage 2 children and on a few occasions by younger children. Methods of ‘respite’ (taking a pause during chase games without the risk of being caught) was also seen at all four schools either by the use of ‘bases’ (which at S3 was limited to one particular patch of odd coloured tarmac) and/or by the use of special words and hand signals.

#### Summary

A rich variety of play and games was observed in all four schools during observation sessions. There was also a consistency in the types of play that was seen across the schools although there was also some variation based mainly on physical differences of the school site. Much of the play seen was closely linked to a specific location which in some cases had been deliberately provided for play, such as in shelters or fixed play equipment for example, but other popular spaces were more improvised such as spaces around sheds and outbuildings, corners and groups of trees and specific bushes.

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Despite movement being the form of play that most catches the eye, play that did not involve running around was more common and over lunchtimes this increased as time progressed. Walking around, sitting, playing in and with natural materials, climbing and swinging, and play involving pretence and the imaginary were seen to occur more frequently and involve more players than football or chase games.

### Playful interactions between children and adults

40. Examples of adults engaging in children's play were observed at all four schools during the observation sessions. Most interactions observed took place at lunchtime and involved a midday supervisory assistant. These interventions were few, however, and often limited to turning a rope for long-rope skipping games. Almost all adults were seen to engage in conversation with children but during playtimes and lunchtimes adults were more occupied with supervising/dealing with issues and accidents or generally patrolling the site than engaged in any form of play.
41. The most frequently observed interactions between adults and children over playtimes and lunchtimes involved an adult intervening in some form of play that was already ongoing and which usually resulted, intentionally or otherwise, in that example of play stopping. In some cases, adults intervened when they felt a particular type of play was becoming too boisterous. When this was the case and there was an opportunity to question the intervention the adult involved almost always said it was in order to prevent injury. This often took the form of a piece of equipment or a toy being taken away or children being told to stop what they were doing. There were also occasions where interventions were made by an adult after an incident had taken place, such as a minor bump or a disagreement for example, sometimes with little knowledge of what had actually occurred or how, and in the circumstances quick decisions were being made. In a small number of cases this led to blame being wrongly apportioned or misinterpreted. This was particularly true in one of the schools where the list of possible misdemeanours seemed broad and where the reaction to incidents, by midday supervisory staff, seemed at times to border on the aggressive.
42. Supervisory and teaching staff had noted in their interviews that a significant amount of their time on duty was spent dealing with minor accidents and there were small bumps and scrapes observed that required attention from staff during almost all observation sessions. These were mainly as a result of people tripping or bumping into things and each other while playing. It was also noticeable, however, that there were more minor bumps and scrapes occurring than staff on duty noticed. Some of these were self-reported by children: if an accident occurred that needed attention but had not been seen by staff then children either brought this to the attention of an adult themselves or other children on the playground did. However, many minor incidents were observed after which children simply dusted



themselves off, sometimes with the assistance of other children, and then carried on playing without reference to any adult.

### Summary

Most of the time spent by adults on the playground at playtimes and lunchtimes involved dealing with incidents and accidents or generally patrolling the site. Time for involvement in children's play was limited and rarely observed.

Interpreting what had happened during an incident and making decisions often had to be made quickly and in some cases this led to misinterpretation and blame being wrongly apportioned.

### Children's Likes and Dislikes

43. During the interviews all 48 children were individually asked about their favourite and least favourite element of playtimes and lunchtimes. These were then elaborated upon in discussions with the rest of the group. The most often given 'favourite thing' was access to the school field/grass area (see also Fig. 1). This was mentioned equally by girls and boys but more often by children at Key Stage 2 than Key Stage 1. When discussing this further people generally agreed that the popularity of 'the grass' was less to do with the grass itself and more to do with having access to the whole field to play in. For example, one said when the field was in use, "There's lots more to do, [it's] more spread out, and we can do more things." (KS2 girl S4).
44. It was noticeable when discussing favourite places in the school grounds that areas on or close to the school field were mentioned most often. Even though the school field was not in use at three of the four schools at this stage in the evaluation, forms of play closely connected with grass and trees were still being referred to in interviews without prompting. At one school the most consistent area identified by children as their favourite in the school grounds by numerous interview groups was an area of grass and trees that, rather than being on the school field, was actually an ornamental area close to the school buildings. This was an area they were 'banned' from using (but were often seen trespassing onto during observation sessions). Asked why such spaces were so popular it was not just access to more open space that was mentioned: children often contrasted the field with the hard surface playground saying that the playground was, "Dull" (KS2 girl S3), and "Because it's all the same" (KS2 boy S2). Put simply, they saw the school field as giving them more options and choices than the playground.
45. Fixed play equipment (climbing frames and swinging bars for example) came second in the list of most favourite. Noticeably, at the school with the least access to this type of play it was the fixed play equipment that received the most criticism

of playtimes and lunchtimes. Key Stage 2 children at this school also felt that they generally had a poor deal compared to the younger children in school. As one said, "It's not fair. They [KS1] get loads of time and they have bicycles and better equipment and climbing stuff than us." (KS2 boy). There was no real complaint made at the other three schools, particularly S4 which had the most extensive play equipment of the four. Interestingly, children at this school said it was the proximity of trees and bushes (around which the equipment was placed) that made it so popular.

46. Chasing games and football also made the list of favourite things. Football was only mentioned by boys almost all of whom said they usually played football all-day, everyday.

**Fig. 1 Most favourite thing about playtimes and lunchtimes**

	KS1 Girls	KS1 Boys	KS2 Girls	KS2 Boys	Total
Grass/School field	1	1	6	6	14
Fixed play equipment	1	4	3	1	9
Chasing games	4	1	1	1	7
Football	-	-	-	6	6
Friends	1	-	2	1	4
Outdoors/Fresh air	1	2	-	-	3
Other/Watching others play	1	-	-	-	1
Total	9	8	12	15	44

N = 48 (91.5% responded)

47. Children found it much harder to answer a question about their least favourite thing about playtimes and lunchtimes than their favourite (see Fig. 2). Two explicitly said 'nothing' in answer to this and twelve failed to give any answer. When discussing this further most said they simply could not think of anything they really disliked.
48. It was the playground itself that scored highest amongst those that did give an answer. Most felt that their playground was "Boring" (KS2 boy S3) or "Just flat. Flat!" (KS2 girl S3) and two younger children felt that there were "Too many people" on the playground (KS1 boy S1 and KS1 girl S3). When asked about favourite spaces on or around the playground almost all mentioned particular

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corners or spaces tucked off the main playground, such as behind sheds (S1 and S3) or clustered around one or more benches (S2 and S4) rather than the playground space itself. In contrast to positive comments about the openness of the school field the 'openness' of the playground was seen as a bad thing.

49. The only dissent to the 'playground' being top of the negative list came from the boys who gave football as their most favourite thing. S1 and S3 both had enclosed areas set aside for football (both old tennis courts) but even at these two schools people said there was still football being played on the main playground, as was confirmed during observations. This caused by far the most animated debate during interviews with more children complaining about it than in favour. Complaints included, for example, "People [playing football] run through your games" (KS2 girl S2) and "You get hit by the ball. It's not fair." (KS2 girl S3). Football was listed as third least favourite thing overall.
50. 'Games' was given as the second least favourite thing. If football had been included in this category it would have being the highest scoring of all but a distinction has been made here because the complaints made about particular 'games' other than football were mainly about adult interventions into playing; and about specific games that they were not allowed to play. Comments included, "Skipping ropes are banned since last summer because of [some people] hitting people with them" (KS2 girl S2); and "They've banned all the good games, like Bulldog" (KS2 boy S3). Asked how he and others had reacted to this the same boy said, "I disguise it with a different name. I call it 'Quality Street'. Teachers are a bit brain dead." Playing with swap cards was mentioned at all four schools during interviews but usually in relation to a ban, "We used to have swap cards but there were arguments so they got banned." (KS2 boy S2), and "We used to bring cards like Trumps because people used to swap them. It makes trouble in school so [the] school council decided [to ban them]" (KS2 boy S4).
51. Generally, in the context of play and playing children speaking in the interviews were not very complimentary about the adults at their school. They saw the adult role as being one who stops things from happening rather than one who provides. The only exception to this was the 'Huff and Puff' scheme, a local council project involving equipment boxes and activity cards aimed at increasing activity levels amongst children at lunchtime which was usually facilitated by adults in the school. This was mentioned a number of times by children at three of the four schools but despite some of the individual pieces of equipment being popular they were generally indifferent to the initiative itself. The reasons given for this were mainly that they felt they would rather do their 'own thing' at lunchtime.
52. Asked if greater adult involvement in their play is something they would value almost all said, "Not really" (KS2 boy S3). The general feeling seemed to be that most could not understand why adults would want to be involved more and that such involvement was not really necessary. "Lunchtime is for playing" said a KS2 girl (S4) voicing her concerns that more adult involvement at lunchtime would just simply interfere with that.

Fig. 2 Least favourite thing about playtimes and lunchtimes

	KS1 Girls	KS1 Boys	KS2 Girls	KS2 Boys	Total
Playground	3	3	2	2	10
Games	3	3	-	1	7
Football	1	2	1	2	6
School work/Time out	-	2	-	4	6
Other*	2	1		1	4
Fixed play equipment	-	-	1	1	2
Nothing	1	-	-	-	1
Total	10	11	4	11	36

N = 48 (75% responded)

### Summary

Despite a variety in access to materials and equipment at each school there seemed to be a consensus that children generally enjoyed their playtimes and lunchtimes. Children across the whole school seemed very capable of expressing their views about what they liked and disliked with some issues in particular creating heated discussion.

Unlike some of the adults at their school they had a very clear idea about what playtimes and lunchtimes were for and felt quite strongly that these parts of the day were for them and for playing. The more options and choices they had available to them the more positive they felt.

Children were generally not positive about the role of adults at playtimes and lunchtimes. They saw adults as people who stop play happening through interventions and bans. They were also suspicious of more adult involvement in play, feeling that this might lead to further restrictions.

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## Comparing the Adult View with the Children's View

53. Possibly, the most notable difference between the adult view and the children's view about playtimes and lunchtimes resulting from the first stage evaluation interviews is the difference in opinion over what these periods of the day are actually for. Adults rarely used the word 'play' in their answers, mentioning instead the social aspects of playtime and the value of a 'break' from work. The children on the other hand spoke of little else but play and saw 'playing' as what these periods of the day were for. The social aspects of playtimes were recognised by children but they saw this in the context of play rather than the other way around and the idea of a simple 'break' was mentioned by no children at all. Although there were complaints from children about some aspects of their playtimes and lunchtimes they also did not tend to see them as a problem time in the same way as the adults did.
54. There was also a clear difference between what adults believed was happening at playtimes and lunchtimes and the reality. Movement easily catches the eye and so it may be easy to be deceived into believing that running around forms of play are the most common whereas sitting and standing still were actually more common. This may also explain why adults have often failed to notice regular complex pretend play involving imaginary uses of spaces and materials as the examples seen during the observations and expanded upon in the children's interviews were static and based on specific features and spaces in the school grounds that were not always in direct line of sight. It is clearly difficult for adults to see much of what actually happens during playtimes if their concentration is held by 'problem' aspects such as accidents and squabbles. This is likely to be even more so for members of the teaching staff who might supervise a 15 minute playtime period once or twice every two weeks rather than for the midday supervisors who are on the playground for the longer lunchtime period every day.
55. Had the children in the interview groups been told that some adults at their school felt that they did not know how to play, or that they lacked imagination and cooperation when they did play, it would likely have come as a surprise to them. The declared desire of adults to become more involved in what children could or could not do at playtimes, however, would probably not have been a surprise but there were clear differences in what children and adults saw in the value of more adult involvement in play and playing. The Huff and Puff scheme, for example, although popular in the adult interviews was met with indifference in the children's.
56. There was agreement between adults and children on two aspects though: both agreed that playtimes are different to class time and aside from any other possible benefits there might be this very difference was seen by both as valuable (though for slightly different reasons). Also, despite the reservations expressed by a number of adults on some aspects of the Pods, the imminent arrival of their Pod, curiosity about what would be in it, and what could be done with it was high among adults and children and all were genuinely excited and looking forward to the prospect of their Play Pod arriving.

### Summary

There was a clear difference between what adults thought was happening on a regular basis at playtimes and lunchtimes and the reality. This may be partly because of the shortage of time adults have to observe what is actually happening either because of timetabling or because of time spent in dealing with incidents.

Both children and adults shared a sense of excitement and curiosity about arrival of their Pod.

## The Pods – on site and in use

### First impressions and immediate effects

57. First impression from adults on seeing their Play Pod for the first time varied from “Wow!” (teacher, S5) and, “I thought excitement, what fun!” (MDSA, S6) to early concern such as “I was a bit doubtful but ready to be surprised” (teacher, S6) and, “I thought there would be more arguments about sharing” (teacher, S7). On first seeing the Pods some also expressed concern about the ability of staff to cope because, “... for staff it was a little bit overwhelming, [they] felt out of control” (headteacher, S1).
58. On seeing what materials were actually in the Pod there were some adults at most of the schools involved who felt that their children might struggle with making best use of it because of their current abilities or experiences. “The play materials were unstructured and our children generally need to be shown/taught how to play because of their limited life experiences.” (teacher, S7) said one for example. These early concerns at the mid stage mirror those of the first stage evaluation interviews. However, almost all staff soon realised these fears appeared unfounded. Some staff began to question the original expectations of their children, “It’s not that modern children are not creative: they just need the right environment to encourage them” (headteacher, S6) and in some cases staff questioned their own role in this, “They [the staff] thought we had ‘control’ over play[time] but what we were really doing was limiting it” (headteacher, S8). Noticeably, it was mainly headteachers making these observations.
59. Asked about the immediate effects of the Pod, “It was manic – no rules!” (headteacher, S3) and “The first day was a bit manic, but it was expected.” (headteacher, S2). Although some reported that a few children ‘held back’ at first most children seemed to have found the Pod attractive right from the start. So much so that some introduced a rota for its use. At S2, for example, the midday supervisors first spilt use of the Pod between Key Stage 1 and 2, and even at first between boys and girls. At S3 the headteacher reported a rush of people wanting to use the Pod at first but added, “At the beginning everyone wanted to use it, now they are using it because they want to” so that first rush of numbers was not

considered an issue. The midday supervisors agreed saying, "We had large numbers at first but that's tailed off." (MDSA, S2). At S6 the school also began the use of their Pod with a class rota but also soon realised this was not necessary and so stopped.

### Summary

First reaction amongst adults to the arrival of the Pod was a mixture of 'wow' and a reinforcement of their early concerns about the unstructured nature of the materials.

Some schools managed the use of the Pod using a rota system but soon realised that the use of a rota was not necessary.

## Rough and tumble Play

60. All the schools reported that the first major effect of the Pod they noticed was an increase in rough and tumble play with (boys particularly) using materials from the Pod as swords and shields. For example, "[There was] A lot of hitting each other with cardboard tubes. A lot of play fighting. No arguing just play fighting." (headteacher, S2); and "There was huge excitement among the children. Anxiety amongst [the] staff. The first week was chaotic, parents complaining about been hurt by things in the Pod ... [because] we had children whacking each other with things." (headteacher, S4). Not all the comments about this first flush of rough and tumble play were negative, though, and some saw it as more than merely 'whacking each other', "It started first because it was too good an opportunity to miss! ... [sword fighting] was in slow motion with sound effects". (headteacher, S3). Most people recognised that although 'rough' this was still a form of play, "I don't think it was done in anger ... they were not meaning to hurt each other." (teacher, S4) and, "The really rough play is the same people who did it before" (MDSA, S3) but they still tended to see it as a negative. At only one of the schools was it felt that rough and tumble had really got out of hand but there were complaints from both children and adults in a number of the schools that lead to the removal of some materials from their Pod or restricting access to others.
61. Adults at the schools reported, however, that this rough and tumble phase did not last long. In fact, some went on to feel that it formed an important stage that had to be gone through and that it directly influenced what happened next, "Swords. Then it developed into shields. We decided if it continued after a week we would take those things out [the materials being used as swords] but then suddenly construction began." (headteacher, S3) and also, "They loved it. They used tubes as swords. [There was] Not much difference between first week and second week, but now they're making dens." (MDSA, S2). All the schools in the project reported a similar sequence of events in the first few days of the Pod being in place: great excitement, large numbers, rough and tumble play which became more complex,

then construction play began, then den building, and with rough and tumble play all but disappearing.

### Summary

Early use of the Pod was manic mainly do to with interest and curiosity among children, which most adults said they expected. However, much of the early use of the materials in the Pod was in the form of rough and tumble play and this was generally unexpected and raised additional concerns over the continued use of the Pod.

This rough and tumble play was not seen as negative by all as some reported that it was often highly imaginative in story line and use of materials. All schools also reported that this phase did not last and that as some point construction play 'suddenly' began.

### Problems, Accidents and Behaviour

62. Despite the early rough and tumble play, there was general agreement amongst adults interviewed that early concerns expressed about possible negative effects of the Pod had not materialised. Quite the reverse in fact. One headteacher said, "The class teachers were not happy [about the effect of the Pod] for about the first three weeks but no complaints since then." (headteacher, S4). A class teacher at the same school elaborated on this saying, "To start with we thought it was having a detrimental effect. We were worried. Then [after a few weeks] behaviour changed. (teacher, S4).
63. All the schools in the project reported this same initial increase in 'problems' on the playground followed by a reduction and, although the time it took varied from school to school, an eventual reduction of problems to a level below that which it had been before the arrival of the Pod. For example, "The start of the afternoon session used to be about sorting problems [but] ... We now have not nearly as many in detention, now hardly any. It's been cut at least by half and that does impact on the afternoon session." (headteacher, S2) and another, "I've seen a reduction in incidents and people sent to the office during lunchtime." (headteacher, S1). When asked during an interview about any effect on behaviour the Pod seemed to be having one headteacher said, 'Not sure. Let's look in the incident log.' Reading the log book showed just two incidents logged in recent weeks compared to nine in the same number of weeks before the arrival of the Pod.



### Summary

There was general agreement among adults that after the initial introduction of the Pod the possible negative effects they had feared did not materialise. In fact, most reported a general fall in unwanted behaviour to level below that it had been before the arrival of the Pod.

64. There were a number of minor accidents reported during interviews involving materials from the Pod, mainly trips over pieces of scrap material left on the floor, but concerns expressed during the first stage evaluation interviews over an expected rise in accidents were felt not to have materialised, “We still worry but the injuries haven’t materialised like we thought they would.” (MDSA, S2). The introduction of the Pod seemed to have resulted in fewer people running around in chase games and playing football in favour of using the materials from the Pod so there was simply less opportunity for people tripping and bumping into and over things and each other, by far the most common form of accident occurring in the school accident books up to the introduction of the Pod. An examination of the accident books of each school during this part of the evaluation showed a general reduction in recorded accidents overall.
65. Equally significant however, the interviews showed a subtle change in attitude towards accidents by staff. For example, most staff reported that they were now reacting to minor incidents differently and were, “... less quick to intervene, waiting to see where it’s going”. (headteacher, S1). Instead of jumping straight in to deal with an incident as they might have done they noticed that taking a slight pause meant that children often got back up again and carried on playing with no ill-effect. Some also noted that children themselves seemed less inclined to self-report minor bumps and scrapes. As one said, “It’s as if children are not saying they had hurt themselves because they wanted to continue playing (teacher, S5). In a significant number of cases, especially among midday supervisors, it was seeing this approach being employed by the playworkers present during the first few days of the Pod being in place that was said to have started this re-think.

### Summary

All schools reported a reduction in minor accidents while the Pod was in place. More significantly many adults at the schools began to look at accidents in a very different way to previously and were less quick to intervene in minor bumps and scrapes.

In a significant number of cases it was observing the way that the Play Pod playworkers reacted to minor bumps and scrapes that started this re-think.

66. One complaint that was made, which had not received much attention during the earlier interviews, related to tidying up the Pod after use. At first, the things in the Pod had been neatly stacked away in groups of like material and staff tried to encourage children to put things back neatly in the same way after use. This was said to be time consuming and in some cases children, "... who have been using the Pod walk away and don't help tidy up." (MDSA, S4). But most reported that neatly packing away scrap materials in the boxes after use was simply impractical and seemed unnecessary. At the beginning of a session, "They just pull everything out and pick what they want to use anyway so [at the end of lunchtime] we just open the doors and throw everything back in." (MDSA, S2). This approach was soon adopted independently by all the schools in the project.

### Summary

An unexpected issue arose over trying to neatly pack away the Pod after each session but all the schools soon realised this was not practical. All the schools came up with the same solution which was not to be concerned over neatness and just throw everything back in at the end of a session.

## The Effect on Play and Playing

67. All those interviewed said they had noticed changes in the way the way materials from the Pod had been used as the project progressed. Children began by first using individual items from the Pod independently of other items (such as using tubes as swords for example) but soon began combining items together, "It has become more constructive as time has gone on." (MDSA, S3) and building soon became the predominant activity.
68. In many cases staff also reported how cooperative they saw children being - with each other and in the combining of scrap materials from the Pod with other equipment in use at lunchtime. This often involved using skipping ropes to tie things together especially in den building, "They got really obsessed with building dens and used skipping ropes to tie stuff against railings." (teacher, S7). Combined with other materials in the Pod these dens soon became a centre of much pretend play. One said, "They make tents, then do dressing up, weddings and hairdressing and that." (MDSA, S3) and another said, "Lots of den building, lots of dressing up." (headteacher, S1). Den building proved popular but was not the only example of building noted, "They're always inventing new games. At first the drain pipes, they just carried them round but then they made chutes down the slope, then they made a bridge" (MDSA, S4); "They used to put the material over things but now they make hammocks. They've been using the tubes as telescopes [the same tubes they had used for play fighting early on]." (MDSA, S4).

69. Despite some reservations mentioned in the earlier evaluation interviews about the type of materials that would be in the Pod there were comments made at this stage of the evaluation about the quality and adaptability of the scrap materials. Most felt that it was access to these loose parts that had allowed the improvisation they had seen occur, “The quantity of stuff is very good.” (teacher, S4). Even the simplest of items proved popular, as one midday supervisor said, “There are never enough cardboard boxes.” (MDSA, S4). An increasing complexity in what children were building was noted by many but this was also being seen in the context of increasingly complex play. For example, “What impressed me was how they played with it. They made quite complicated swings and pulleys ... I really didn’t expect them to be able to do this.” (teacher, S4).
70. Although most felt the process so far had been, “... a steep learning curve” it was also generally felt that, “Having a Play Pod has made a focus for play ... This has made me think about play in a different way.” (headteacher, S2). Others said, “I think it’s more relaxed on the playground because of the Pod” (MDSA, S2) and, “The children don’t seem so whiney and whingey. And they’re also playing with children they don’t usually play with.” (MDSA, S4). Almost all reported feeling very positive about what they had seen from the Pod so far but they also felt that it was not providing something *different* for their children to do at lunchtime that had been significant, although it was acknowledged that this in itself was useful, “If they’re not sports orientated there’s little to do.” (MDSA, S3). What was felt to be more significant though was what their children had been able to *do* as a result of access to flexible loose parts, “It’s about making choices and that’s what the play Pod has done.” (headteacher, S3).

### Summary

The adults noticed a clear progression in the use of the Pod that was consistent in all the schools. Use of the materials became increasingly complex and cooperative, especially in den building. Adults also began to change their feelings on the materials used moving away from a concern over the unstructured nature of the things to a feeling that it was the unstructured element of the materials that was the catalyst.

Adults also began to report seeing play and playing in a different light to before.

### Concerns for the Future

71. Members of staff were asked in the interviews at this stage of the evaluation if they had any concerns about what might happen once their Pod was removed. Almost everyone reported that they had been considering this already. This was addressed to midday supervisors especially as they had been the group expressing most concerns about the Pod actually arriving in the first place. All

agreed that, "It's been worth it but it was scary at first." (MDSA, S2) and that having the Pod had so far not made their job any harder, "Not harder or easier just changed the focus." (MDSA, S4). Once again, it was this group of staff that expressed most concerns about what effect losing the Pod might have, "The kids are going to miss it. They'll be very upset, and the arguments are going to start." (MDSA, S2). One said about the day the Pod would finally go that, "I think I might go sickie that day!" (MDSA, S4).

72. Other members of staff also expressed concerns about the effect of the Pod leaving, especially headteachers who also agreed that, "Without a doubt it's been a very positive experience." (headteacher, S4) while recognising that, "I think if the 'choice' disappears, the old problems may come back." (headteacher, S3)

### Summary

Whilst the Pods were still in place adults began to speculate on what might happen once it had been removed. There was a general feeling that without the Pod many of the old problems might return.

## Children's Voices

### First Impressions

73. "Surprise. I thought it would be full of ropes and plastic things" said one (KS2 girl S4) and, "The things in it are not what you usually see" said another (KS2 girl S2). The first comments children tended to make in their interviews at this stage in the evaluation related directly to the materials in the Pod which seems to reflect the way they were reported first using it by the adults interviewed, in other words they focussed on individual items first. However, comments were also made about the Pod itself with some thinking, "[the project manager] showed us a little model so I thought it would be a little box with things in." (KS1 girl S2); "It looked different. It looked like a house but it was really a box." (KS1 boy S3); and "I thought you'd be able to go in it but it was more better (sic)." (KS2 boy S3).
74. Everyone in the interview groups said they had used the Pod as soon as it arrived but not all had continued to use it to the same extent. One said for example, "I used it for five minutes then went to play football." (KS1 boy S2). This boy was one of those that had reported that football was his favourite thing about playtimes and lunchtimes and noticeably most of those who had said they spent most or all of their time playing football (with the exception of children at S4) reported that they still did this when the Pod was present.
75. However, the majority interviewed said they were using the Pod almost everyday. There were some who did not equate playing with the scrap materials from the

Pod as 'playing with the Pod'. For example one said, "I just play with my friends." (KS2 girl S2) but closer discussion revealed that she and her friends were playing with the loose parts almost everyday. Another said he did not use the Pod very much but, "I just take the equipment [away from the Pod] and play with my friends." (KS2 boy S4).

76. Comments were also made about the early appearance of fighting although most were keen to point out that this was actually playing, 'It wasn't fighting!' (KS2 boy S4). One said, "There was a lot of whacking but that's stopped now. (KS2 girl S2). They generally felt it had stopped because, "At first we had all the problems with it but after a while people started to see what you could really do with it. I didn't really like it at first, but now!" (KS2 girl S3).

### Summary

Early impressions of the Pod amongst children included similar surprise as with the adults. All reported making use of the Pod early on and all but a few continued using it throughout the project. However, children seemed to make a distinction between using 'the Pod' and using the materials from the Pod.

The children also commented about the early appearance of rough and tumble play but not see this as an issue to the extent that adults had done.

### Practicalities

77. A number of comments were made about the use of a rota for using the Pod (at some of the schools a rota was still in use at the time of the interviews). One said, "It's a different class every day but we can all use it on Fridays." Asked what she felt about this she said she preferred playing with the Pod on Fridays because of the mix of people available to play with. Almost all felt that free-use of the Pod was more preferable to having a rota and comments made on this issue across interview groups were linked to the importance of friends. For example one said, "I have friends in year 4 that I want to play with." (KS2 girl S2). But in some cases it was felt that the rota was not much of a barrier, because, "People sneak in when it's not their turn." (KS1 boy S3).
78. Nor were people only using the loose parts directly in front of the Pod. All the schools had designated an area for using Pod materials, "We were told to use the stuff [in a cordoned off] bit in front of the box." (KS1 boy S3) but not everyone stuck to this rule, "We used it [the loose parts] in the adventure playground [fixed play equipment], in the music area, and behind the Play Pod as well." (KS2 girl S3). At all of those schools that had fixed play equipment on site (with the exception of S2) children also reported regularly combining loose parts from the Pod with the big play equipment mentioning things such as building dens under

climbing frames and tying hammocks to upright supports even though, "We've been told not use it on the play park." (KS1 boy S4).

79. The most frequently mentioned practical issue in the children's interviews was about packing away. One said, "You have to climb in [the Pod] over things to get stuff to build with." (KS1 girl S3) although she did not see this as a problem. As the adults had reported in their interviews, children also reported that they generally pulled everything out of the Pod at the beginning of a session anyway and made a selection of what to play with then. As one said, "It sort of works." (KS2 boy S2). Packing away was another issue altogether though. Some people said, "People run away when the bell goes." (KS2 girl S3) to avoid packing away but more comments were made such as, "Sometimes when you're playing you get really lost and you can't hear the whistle to put things it away." (KS1 girl S4) and, "We need to keep on playing with the things because its so much fun and so we don't put things away." (KS1 boy S4).

### Summary

The use of a rota with the Pods was not seen as positive amongst children particularly because it often restricted them from playing with friends who were not in the same class or year group. Packing away was seen as more of a problem but dragging everything out of the Pod at the start of a session actually made choosing what to play with easier.

### Likes and Dislikes

80. Asking people in the interview groups what they liked about using the Play Pod produced animated discussion with children often changing their minds about their most favourite thing multiple times. Comments included, "I liked the costumes and stuff. And we've made houses, and stuff." (KS1 boy S4); "I like making dens." (KS1 boy S2); "I made traps in the dome thing [willow structure!]" (KS1 boy S4); "The boys have been dressing up as girls with wigs and handbags and having weddings." (KS2 girl S2).
81. Nor did the discussions stick to the simple question of what they liked most as detailed descriptions were added and children asked each other questions and swapped ideas of new things to try later. In most cases the descriptions of what people had played that afternoon showed a progression from a basic idea based on one or two items, which in some cases had been pulled at random from the Pod, followed by discussion amongst a small group about how it could be used or what it was seen to represent, the selection of other items to add to this idea, then construction, and then pretend play. One typical example was, "First, we made a car!" There was then a journey in the car which led to, "... making a beach, 'cos there's this blue river thing [a tarpaulin] and we used this white sheet for the sand."

(KS1 girl S2). One of the older children at the same school said, "We made a shop and then we've been stealing things from the supermarkets! Like handbags!" (KS2 girl S2).

82. It was clear in the examples that children gave in their interviews that pretend play formed a key part of the things they made out of the loose parts from the Pod and the flexible and ambiguous nature of the materials was central to this. It allowed different children to see different things in the same materials and yet be able to change the meaning of what an item represented without major conflict and develop shared meaning through discussion and agreement. For example, one girl during an evaluation visit (S2) showed the author a construction made of cardboard tubes, foil and material saying, "Look, what we've made! It's a spaceship." (KS2 girl) At which point her fellow builder exclaimed, "No it's not It's a car!" (KS2 boy). The girl then said, "Oh! Ok then" and they both jumped into the spaceship/car and continued playing.
83. This was summed up very nicely in one interview group when someone said, "Best thing? "The rules. There are no rules. One of the rules is that it's for children. No rules." (KS2 girl S4).
84. Hardly any dislikes were mentioned during the interviews and most that were mentioned related to particular items in the Pod that were felt to be less useful. Most interview groups mentioned the empty video cassette boxes for example as something they were not making use of.

### Summary

The children reported a similar development in the use of the Pod as did the adults interviewed. The form of play most reported spending the greatest amount of time on involved multiple playmates and was high in imagination and pretence.

## After the Pods had left

### Immediate effects

85. Adults at all the schools agreed that the Pod leaving had felt very sudden. "It just seemed to disappear." (headteacher, S3). Another said, "Twelve weeks? Was it really that long? The time flew past." (headteacher, S4). Interviews for the second stage of the evaluation had found that there was already some apprehension about what the effect of losing the Pod might be and this was often repeated during interviews in this final stage. For example, "The teachers and the dinner ladies [MDSAs] were all very worried about what was going to happen." (headteacher, S3). Staff at most schools also said that although children were told the Pod would be leaving soon they were still unhappy once it had actually gone.

86. One said, “Fighting has come back.” (MDSA, S4) and another said, “Boys have been fighting again.” (MDSA, S3). The headteacher and one class teacher at S3 mentioned this too. However, the midday supervisors at S4 felt that although rough and tumble play had returned it was at a lower level than it had been before the Pod arrived.
87. Complaints from adults over football dominating space had also returned at a number of schools, for example, “Since [the Pod] has gone we’ve been talking about banning football again because of issues.” (headteacher, S3). This school was one of those with a separate enclosed area available for football but despite a general ban on ball games on the playground once the Pod had left the playing of football increased in frequency and began to be played on the main playground again.
88. It was a lack of access to the loose parts that had been seen sparking off imagination that was felt to be the biggest loss from the Pods leaving. Comments were made in interviews about seeing less cooperation in evidence again and whereas staff felt that whilst the Pods had been present children were playing in groups they might not ordinarily play with (which was confirmed by children themselves) now the Pods had left there was general agreement that, “They’ve gone back into their little groups again now [as in before the Pod]. And there’s less focus.” (MDSA, S4).

Summary

Once the Pod had left adults interviewed reported many of the problems they saw before the Pod had returned thought not necessarily to the same level. However, they saw the biggest effect as being the loss of the loose parts and the focus they gave to imagination and cooperation.

The Effect on Play and Playing

89. The post-Pod survey asked adults in each school what they felt had been the effect of having a Pod on their lunchtime period. All responded that it had been positive – the majority felt it had very positive (see Fig. 3)

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	X
Responses	-	-	-	2	9	21	-

Fig. 3 Results from staff questionnaires – effect on lunchtime

N = 32

X = not completed

0 = lowest possible score, 5 = highest



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90. People commented during the post-Pod survey and during the final stage interviews that they saw children continuing to play with the Pod right up to the last day it was present and den building continued to be amongst the most frequently observed play. Comments made included, “Dens and dressing up seem to be extremely popular right through.” (NTA, S5) and, “It was really successful. The children really enjoyed playing dens” (teacher, S7); “Building shelters remained the most popular activity ... and dressing up” (headteacher, S6).
91. A significant number of positive comments were also made relating to children sharing, turn taking, and cooperating for example, “It was nice seeing the older children playing with the younger children” (teacher, S7). The number of schools in the project in which there were children with a physical disability was few, however the issue of inclusion in its broadest sense was raised a number of times with a feeling that generally this had been a very positive aspects of the use of the Pod. These comments were made in the context of this sharing element and the level of cooperation observed as well as a sense that no-one had been left out.
92. As reported above almost all the adults interviewed at this stage in the evaluation reported that since the Pods had left things had gone back to much as they were before the Pods arrived, had done so quite quickly, and had stayed that way. People felt the reasons for this was that as there was now no access to the type of loose parts used while the Pods were in place they had seen little in the way of complex play or in adaptation of other materials that could still be found in the school grounds. Something they seem to have grown used to seeing while the Pods were in place.

### Accidents and Risk

93. Attitudes towards ‘risk’ after the Pods had left differed from school to school, the experience at S3 was more positive than at S4, for example. However, the midday supervisors at all the schools reported that they were still ‘stepping back’ more than they would have done before having the Pod and interestingly, midday supervisors at all schools also said they now felt more comfortable about risk associated with their fixed play equipment (which had been in place before the arrival of the Pods); at S4 they felt there had been fewer accidents on this equipment even after the Pod had left. This change in attitude towards risk was not just restricted to the midday supervisors though. The headteacher at S3, for example, said he saw the Adventure Park (fixed play equipment) as more ‘risky’ than the Pod but now saw general running around as the riskiest. Examining the accident books of all the schools confirmed this view as despite a reduction in accidents overall while the Pods were in place those accidents that had occurred almost always involved climbing equipment or general running around rather than the Pod or any of the materials it contained.
94. The experience at S4 was very different. The headteacher said, “You actually have to have this thing [the Pod] out there to see how it works. We entered fully into the thing about ethos of risk” but a number of incidents had led this headteacher feeling that the project had not been successful in this context, “[This approach to risk] we realised was wrong for us.” Despite this, the headteacher felt

that, "Risk became a big thing. [But] Children started to make their own risk assessment." The headteacher went on to say that if they were to make any difference to next time they, "... would have developed our own ground rules."

95. In some respects the midday supervisors at the same school agreed with this view saying, "The more they've got [the children] the more risks they take." They reported that a number of accidents at the school towards the end of the project, and some that had happened after the Pod had gone resulted in the midday supervisors becoming more cautious towards risk taking again. But there is confusion with these verbal reports as an examination of the schools accident records still showed a reduction in total accidents during the period while the Pod was in place and immediately afterwards.

### Summary

Attitudes towards risk and the reaction to minor accidents at all but one of the schools in the project had experienced a change as a result of the project. In all except one school the staff reported being less risk-averse than before having had a Pod and now perceived the issue of risk in a more positive and realistic way. The actual incidence of minor accidents reduced during and after the Pod was in place at all the schools, including the one school which had not embraced this less risk-averse view.

### Behaviour

96. Remarks about unwanted behaviour post-Pod were more positive but at times also contradictory. For example one said, "Some 'behaviour' has come back although perhaps it's not gone back to what it was." (teacher, S2). The headteacher at this school agreed saying the number of people sent into the office over lunchtime had gone down while the Pod was in place and it had not increased again after the Pod had gone, "We don't get any more sent in since the Pod has gone." (headteacher, S2). A number of other headteachers agreed. Other comments were made however such as, "There's been a bit of fussing [after lunchtime] about kids not joining in. It has come in from the playground [to the classroom]. It wastes 10-15 minutes settling down. They have said 'so and so has said he won't let me join in' ... I didn't see any of that when the Pod was here." (teacher, S3). And as noted above, the general reaction from midday supervisors during interviews in this final stage was also that some unwanted behaviour had returned, though possibly with less frequency.
97. It seems clear that some unwanted behaviour present before the Pods returned once the Pods had gone (possibly added to by frustration from children over the loss of the Pod) but generally the feeling was that the levels of unwanted behaviour were lower than before. What might be more significant though is that in

a similar way to the change in attitudes towards minor accidents seen amongst adults in the schools during the second stage of the evaluation, there seems to have been a change in the way that most staff at the schools perceived the behaviour of their children. A more tolerant view seems to have developed and a greater understanding of the frustrations that their children can face over playtime and lunchtime could be seen in many of their comments.

### Summary

Some 'unwanted behaviour seen at school before the Pods seemed to have returned once the Pod had left but not to the same extent. Staff have also developed a more tolerant view towards 'behaviour' and have developed a greater understanding of the issues facing their children at playtime and lunchtime.

### Effects on learning

98. More emphasis in this final stage of the evaluation was given over to the question of what, if any, effect schools had seen on the classroom during and after the Pods had been in place than had been at other stages. In evaluation interviews people seemed to find this a hard question to answer. It often resulted in long silences and in discussion between interviewees before answering, more so than for any other question asked.
99. None of the teachers or non-teaching assistants interviewed reported specific developments in terms of measurable learning, i.e. 'hard skills', but a number of comments were made about 'soft skills', in other words positive effects that impact on learning indirectly or the ability or willingness to learn rather than on measurable learning outcomes. Some felt it was too early to say what difference on learning the experience of the Pods may have had for example, "It's difficult to say. I would be interested to see if they can still use their imaginations as much now the Pod is not there." (NTA, S4) but such comments were made with the realisation that imaginative content while the Pods were present was high, "Once a child came up with an idea it became a seed and whoosh!" (headteacher, S3).
100. This was a pattern that continued through the post-Pod survey too for example, "I can't honestly say I've noticed anything different in the classroom", and "I have seen no change" (both said by teachers at S5) are typical answers to this question; and at least one person seemed to imply that they felt the Pod should not have had an effect on the classroom saying, "It didn't intrude on the inside of the school" (teacher, S6).
101. The majority however made positive comments on the effect of the Pod on learning, headteachers in particular. One said, "My teachers are under pressure to achieve. New teachers will have happiness and health to consider too and I see

play as part of that.” (headteacher, S2); and, asked if the benefits they saw had been because of the Pod the same headteacher said, “I think it was the Pod that gave the impetus in all this. I don’t need any convincing.” (headteacher, S2)

102. The post-Pod survey added another dimension to this question. It asked people to score how strongly they felt the Play Pod had had a positive effect on the classroom and learning and to add an explanation of why (see Fig. 4). If people answering 0, 1, 2 or X for this question is taken as generally negative and 3, 4 and 5 as increasingly positive then the results show that respondents were divided 50/50 on whether the Play Pods had a positive effect on the classroom.

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	X
Responses	2	2	5	3	10	3	7

Fig. 4 Results from staff questionnaires – positive effect on learning (1)

N = 32

X = not completed

0 = lowest possible score, 5 = highest

103. If these figures are looked at in further detail an interesting pattern develops. Fig. 5 separates respondents into ‘class teachers’, and ‘others’. This shows that most teaching staff reported seeing a minimal positive effect on the classroom (76% of teaching staff respondents agreeing) but only 20% of the ‘others’ concurred with this view. Most of these ‘others’ were non-teaching or classroom assistants but two were headteachers and a third was a SENCO (these latter people were included in the ‘others’ group because they generally did not spend time with a consistent, regular class group). This latter group seem to feel that effects on the classroom had been more positive than had their class teacher colleagues. The SENCO, for example, said, “I think the Pod [has increased] opportunities for children to improve their emotional and social wellbeing which is beneficial to all aspects of learning.” One of the headteachers said, “It’s definitely had a good effect on the classroom. One [of my] teachers said that in circle time they talk about how good playtime has been rather than before when it was just complaints ... I guess that settles them back into learning.” (headteacher, S1)

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	X
Others	2	0	1	1	8	3	0
Teaching	0	2	4	2	2	0	7

Fig. 5 Results from staff questionnaires – positive effect on learning (2)

N = 32

X = not completed

0 = lowest possible score, 5 = highest

- 
104. Amongst this latter group of staff some of the positive comments made in this context were related to behaviour and most were about the development of a more 'positive attitude' and 'ability to learn' rather than on measurable outcomes (soft learning rather than hard learning again) but never-the-less they seem to have concluded that the effects on the classroom had been more significant than that of class teachers. Effects on concentration and (as seen above) cooperation were mentioned frequently throughout the whole evaluation across staff including comments made such as, "I've never seen them so occupied" (headteacher, S6) and another said, "We didn't put any restrictions [on using the Pod]. We just opened the doors. It was a bit wild at first but it didn't get out of hand. It's been one of the most amazing things I've seen in my time in education" (headteacher, S5) but the difference in quite how this has been perceived by teaching and non (or 'less') teaching staff is stark.
105. An early hypothesis of the evaluation was the idea that measuring influences on direct classroom learning would be beyond the capability of the evaluation and the Play Pod project team were careful from the start of the project in avoiding any claim about being able to influence this aspect of schooling, at least in part because any positive effect in terms of learning would probably not be apparent for some time. One headteacher felt the same, "I don't think that twelve weeks has been long enough to see a difference to the curriculum" (headteacher, S6). But it is interesting to note that it is this non-teaching section of the school staff who have been more positive in terms of the Pods effect on learning.
106. This may be because classroom teachers saw less of the Pod in use than their non-teaching assistants, who are often on duty at lunchtimes, and some of the senior staff who could report fewer children being 'sent to the office' than before. It may also be because the teachers in the schools were less involved in the training element of the project than were the midday supervisors. Midday Supervisors in particular often commented that it was a combination of attending the training and seeing the Pod in action that calmed their fears and allowed them to see the Pod as being a positive and beneficial thing. A class teacher at one school also referred to this saying that there had been issues with some (teaching) staff members feeling that some of what they could see happening "was inappropriate" but she felt the main reason for this was that the midday supervisory staff had attended the training element and that the teaching staff had not. She said, "We would have liked all the staff to have had an input."
107. What seems to be more significant however is that in answering this question class teachers have clearly equated 'learning' with their 'teaching'. Examining comments made by some teachers on what they feel has been successful with the Pod (cooperation and sharing, inclusion, imagination, etc.) throughout the evaluation show that they have seen an effect of the Pod that should be positive in terms of learning and beneficial to their teaching and have made direct comments to that effect; yet at the final conclusion of the project a significant number of class teachers in particular seem to have struggled to justify a link between these elements taking place outside and what they do inside. It seems that the goal-oriented constraints of current teacher-training have produced a barrier that some have found difficult to overcome.

108. This seems confirmed by results of the post-Pod evaluation in which a significant number of people did not attempt an answer to this question: seven out of seventeen failed to answer it, the only question left largely unanswered. This suggests that many have found this a genuinely difficult question to answer. Clearly, what they have really struggled with is not the concept and the benefits of free-play with loose parts, particularly for older children, in the context of learning; but that for some the struggle has been about understanding this form of play in the context of their own teaching (see also para. 124).

### Summary

More non-teaching and senior management staff reported seeing positive effects of the Pod on the classroom than did classroom teachers. This may be explained by the former having seen less of the Pods in use, or by them not having the same training input as the midday supervisors.

Another possibility might be that their own training and outcome-led form of working, and the Pods working in an 'outdoor' context might have hindered some in linking the soft learning opportunities of the Pod with the learning environment of the classroom.

## Children's Voices

### Return to Football

109. "It's terrible. Terrible. It was there, and then it wasn't there! Just terrible. There was just, like a big white patch were it had been." (KS2 girl S3). Not everyone expressed their feelings about the loss of the Pod in quite the way this girl did, but the consensus among all the children's interview groups was that they missed the Pod. Most expressed this in ways linked to what they were playing at the moment, post-Pod. For example, "It's boring now, really boring. We can't do anything its just playing 'normal'" (KS2 girl S4). Boredom came up often in the interviews at this stage in the evaluation. One said, "You could make tents and things before. It's a bit boring now." (KS1 girl S3) and other said, "I'm a thousand times bored. If it came back it would be a thousand times good." (KS2 boy S4).
110. When asked what people were playing at the moment one boy said wearily, "Back to football." (KS2 boy S4). The return of football, as both a good thing and a bad thing, was mentioned a number of times. Those who had consistently said they played football all or most of the time had still not changed their opinion and one (non-football player) said "Some people are more sporty, like [Sam] [pointing]. They didn't really mind but most people [the non-football players] have really missed it I think ... a lot of people really liked making their own thing ... because once you've made it you can have your own space in the playground." (KS2 girl

S3). Other comments included, “Every lunchtime we wouldn’t play football. We made hammocks instead.” (KS1 boy S4) but now, “It’s bad. There’s more football now.” (KS1 girl S4). This latter comment was specifically about trying to avoid footballs when moving across the playground, a complaint that was mentioned a number of times in the first stage evaluation interviews.

111. Even those who said for example, “I liked it. But I wouldn’t just play in it every day.” (KS2 boy S3), were disappointed that the Pod had gone. Another said, “We used to have a quiet club in [a teachers classroom] and you could paint and that. But the Play Pod was better than that because it had proper stuff in it.” (KS2 girl S3). Interestingly, in more than one interview group and in different schools people revealed that they had concealed ‘stuff’ from the Pod around the school site before it left so that still had things left to play with.
112. When asked if there was anything people did not like about the Pod the only comment made by anyone, other than comments about particular items in the Pod that people felt were of little use, was, “People didn’t like it when getting smacked by tubes ... It happened ‘loads’ but they were only play fighting. When the Pod went it turned into real, *real* fights. People were just wound up.” (KS2 girl S4).

### Summary

Children interviewed considered the post-Pod playtimes as ‘boring’ and complained that football and the problems it brought to the playground had returned.

### Sharing

113. Changes in sharing were also mentioned often with a general feeling that while the Pod had been in place they had played with people they might not ordinarily have played with but that, “Some people are a bit bored. Some don’t have many people to play with now. When the Pod was here some people shared [with others] but, no, they don’t play with them now.” (KS2 girl S4). Another said, “More people played together, like, they mixed in more [when the Pod was here] ... now its gone everyone’s got into their little groups.” (KS2 girl S3). She also suggested that people had largely gone back to where they had played before the arrival of the Pod too which seemed to be confirmed by a number of observations of playtimes and lunchtimes in which people had returned to corners that had not been in much use while the Pods were present.

### Accidents and Rough and Tumble Play

114. Children in most of the interview groups said they knew there had been accidents as a result of playing with the Pod. They described a number of minor bumps and

scrapes that they had seen or been involved with. They also felt that there had been fewer minor accidents while the Pod was present than before. However, "Now the Pod has gone all the little ones are running all around and getting hit on [bumped into], and the little ones are getting pushed over." (KS2 girl S3). Another said, "The little ones are so, so small we can't see them ... so they get bumped into." (KS2 girl S3).

115. Rough and tumble play was mentioned by almost all the interview groups at this stage. Thinking back to when the Pods first arrived one girl said, "At first we had all the problems with it but after a while people started to see what you could really do with it. I didn't really like it at first but, you know!" (KS2 girl S3) but again, they saw a difference between fighting and play fighting, "It wasn't fighting!" exclaimed one (KS2 boy S4). But there had been real incidents they said. For example, "People kept knocking into your den ... it would collapse then you'd have to rebuild it." (KS2 girl S3). This was said to sometimes result in some pushing and shoving.
116. Almost all felt there had been an increase in both play fighting and real incidents since the Pod had left, "It's really boring now so everyone's getting in more fights. Because when it was there it was ok but everything goes back to normal." (KS1 boy S4). Another said, "There's more fighting, I think ..." (KS2 girl S3). At one school it was said that regular mass rough and tumble sessions had returned, "All the year 5s want to take the 6s on and they're all trying to fight on the [fixed play equipment]." (KS2 boy S3). This was said to be an occasional thing before the Pods had arrived but it had stopped while the Pod was in place.

### Summary

Children interviewed felt that there had been fewer accidents and less rough and tumble play while the Pods were in place but that both of these had increased after the Pod left.

### Was it all worth it?

117. The final question asked of all the interview groups (children and adult) was, 'Was it all worth it?' This question generated a lot of responses many of which involved repeating points already made. But the question did encourage many to reflect on the outcome of having had a Pod more deeply. For example, one headteacher discussed the changes that having had a Pod had produced. "[It was] a different way of looking at play. In schools play seems physical, running around, football, climbing. The play Pod did not do a lot of that ... it was about manipulative materials, building, cooperating." (headteacher, S3). Another said, "I think we've enjoyed this Pod as much as the children." (deputy headteacher, S5). This view was generally true of other groups among the staff too for example, one midday



supervisor commented with a broad smile that it had been, “A positive experience overall” (MDSA, S3).

118. The post-Pod questionnaire asked it had all been worth it too. All the schools and almost all the individuals responded positively ‘yes’ to this question and when asked would you recommend this to other schools, the answer was again very positive (see Fig. 6)

core	0	1	2	3	4	5	X
Responses	-	-	-	2	1	27	2

Fig. 6 Results from staff questionnaires – would you recommend this to other schools?

N = 32

X = not completed

0 = lowest possible score, 5 = highest

119. The experience of having had loose parts and a form of materials was beyond the previous experience of many and this was commented on by the adults often. Even the fact that the materials were considered expendable, “It did not matter if the materials disappeared. said one (teacher, S7), and another said, “That’s the real beauty of this stuff because you don’t have to worry about throwing things away if it gets broken; or even worry about it *getting* broken.” (headteacher, S6). But this did not mean the materials were being seen in a negative light, for example one said, “The quality of materials provided was great.” (teacher, S2).
120. Despite the comments made about effects on the classroom many adults mentioned that the use of the Pods had allowed them to see their children and what they did at playtimes and lunchtimes in a different light and a number commented that the Pods had done this in a way that they themselves could not have done. The effect on communication and language was said to be very positive but the most positive comments were reserved for the way in which the Pod had encouraged the mixing of children and sharing. One headteacher describing it as, “real inclusion.” (headteacher, S8).
121. For the children, the Pods were clearly becoming part of the playlore of the playground. At S4 for example during the Round 2 interviews one KS2 girl noted that their Pod “... was dented”. Many informally mentioned this saying it must have been done by children at the school “tut, tut” said one. But it was not. It was a major dent in a very heavy metal object that no children could have done. It was in the Pod before it was delivered to this school. Only well liked features become part of the folklore of the playground in this way.

### Summary

All the schools that had taken part in the project were very positive of having had a Pod and felt it was all worth it. All said they would also recommend the use of a Pod to other schools.

## Postscript – what next?

### Replacing the Pod

122. One of the midday supervisors in the final stage of the evaluation said, “Kids have said recently they’re bored, ‘What can we do?’ One [child] said I’m going to join the school council and get some money for equipment. Anything to play with!” (MDSA, S3). There was a view amongst all the adults interviewed at this stage of the evaluation that the loss of the Pod had left a hole and almost all, children and adults, had started to discuss how it could be filled. A number of the adults felt that it was the materials that needed replacing more than the Pod itself. One headteacher said, “My view at the moment is we don’t need a great big container” (headteacher, S2) and some had discussed the possibilities of making their own container or using various large storage boxes. Two of the children in one of the final interview groups of the evaluation exclaimed, “We could make our own [Pod]!” and then spent most the interview discussing between the two of them how they could do this (S3).
123. Some of the adults, particularly the headteachers could see that putting their own Pod equivalent together might prove a time-consuming job and that this might be beyond them. One said, “We would have to put the same effort into this [playtimes] as we do lesson time. ... and we would need an adult to facilitate it.” (headteacher, S7)

### Summary

Most of the schools began considering how to replace the Pod and the loose parts it contained soon after losing their Play Pod. However, most also concluded that this would require quite an effort to make it work in the same way.

### As part of the curriculum

124. At different stages throughout the evaluation, a number of adults questioned the ability of their children to play and use their imagination, usually seeing the barrier

to this as being inherent in their children rather than a result of the environment and the materials available to them. However, having seen the effects of the loose parts in the Pod a number of them said they could now see that access to this type of material presenting an opportunity to enhance their teaching. For example, "I see this [the loose parts] as a possible part of the curriculum" (teacher, S7); "We could have used it more constructively for the learning that we lead [i.e. teaching]." (headteacher, S8); "We should use it more during curriculum time." (teacher, S5); and "We did not have a chance to use the Pod during lessons ... I feel the effect in the classroom would have been greater if we had." (teacher, S7).

125. Two of the schools announced that they had already used the Pod in curriculum delivery. One headteacher said, "We have used the Pod as part of the curriculum. I would probably like to see more of that." (headteacher, S6); and a second said, "The Pod provides some fantastic science opportunities and we have used it in curriculum time." (headteacher, S5).

### Summary

Adults at a number of the schools had expressed an interest in using the Pod, or the type of materials found in the Pod, to enhance their teaching. Two schools reported that they had already used their Pod in delivering part of the curriculum.

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## The Discussion

### Defining play, playing and playwork

For a behaviour that almost every adult has experienced at some point in their lives and despite the plethora of written material on the subject 'play' is not easy to define. Janet Moyles describes trying to do so as similar to "... trying to seize bubbles, for every time there appears to be something to hold on to, its ephemeral nature disallows it being grasped!" (Moyles 1994: 5). Nor is the role of play in learning as clear cut as we might be led to expect. The educational systems in all four nations of the United Kingdom have increasingly structured their early learning curriculum and delivery around the concept of 'learning through play' and there are signs that this idea is making inroads into the teaching of older children in schools too (the Welsh Foundation Phase for example is heavily play-based and involves children in schools up to the age of seven). But the research evidence for a positive link between learning and play is not as strong as one might believe.

In studying this area of research Brian Sutton-Smith notes that,

"The evidence of play studies and game studies is that complexity in play is highly correlated with age. So given this correlation, it is an easy mistake to believe that the major purpose of play development is to contribute to other kinds of age-related development – social, emotional, and cognitive. All move along paths of increasing complexity." (Sutton-Smith 1997: 42)

In other words, the positive effects that might be seen in learning through play may actually be a result of children simply growing older.

Having had the experience of playing ourselves during childhood also does not seem to help in understanding play. As Sylwyn Guilbaud says, "We know the essence of play through the subjective experience of playing, but we are less able to know it through objective analysis." She describes this as a dichotomy (Guilbaud 2003: 17). It is not surprising therefore to find that this dichotomy was present in many of the adult interviews in the Play Pods evaluation where a significant number of trained teachers found it difficult to reconcile the concept of play with learning or to see a purpose in playtimes for all except the very youngest children at their school (see for example paragraph 3).

Attempting to find a definition and a workable taxonomy of play in a learning context would seem essential if a topic that is being given increasing importance in schooling can be developed. But the confusion present when adults in the evaluation schools were asked about the times, regulations and purpose behind playtimes and lunchtimes (paragraph 1) suggests a lack of debate about the role of play and playing (particularly for older children in the primary school) that proves to be a common factor of individual schools as well as the field of education in general (see Armitage 2001). This is complicated by the fact that 'play' is a topic of interest to a wide range of professions and disciplines each of which brings its own agenda and contrary list of required outcomes that seem to make a workable debate impossible.

These are factors that the field of playwork has also had to address. The National Review of Children's Play carried out by the Department of Media Culture and Sport in 2004

(possibly better known as the Dobson Report), and which included a discussion of play at school, provides a definition of play that circumvents the problems of defining play in a learning or mixed agenda context. It simply defines play as, “What children do when they follow their own ideas, in their own way and for their own reasons.” (DCMS 2004). Approaching play in this way can appear highly ‘unstructured’ and at odds with the operating framework of the school, particularly as it is not a goal orientated approach (playwork is about process not end result) but it proves workable because it recognises a difference between ‘play’ and ‘playing’ separating the issues of the theoretical (play) from the actual (playing) and thus providing the basis of our emerging taxonomy.

Some of those adults interviewed in the evaluation expressed concerns over the currently unstructured nature of playtimes and expressed additional concern when first introduced to the unstructured materials in the Pod (see paragraphs 19 and 58 for example) but they did so without the knowledge that the Play Pods (as delivered by a playwork agency) would thrive on this seeming lack of structure, as playwork, “... caters for what children actually play as opposed to what they should play or could play, or even what we think they play” (Armitage 2001: 56). What they actually meant by ‘a lack of structure’ was actually a concern over ‘a lack of clear outcomes’.

Playwork, therefore, applies a very different way of working to that of schooling and has a way of looking at play and playing that is equally as different. As the issue of play becomes of increasing importance to the schools sector these differences hold the key to some very significant potential benefits for schools but there are potential barriers to be overcome too (as returned to later in this discussion). Few adults in the evaluation reported that they had read any literature on the subject of play and playing in general or in a playwork context specifically (paragraph 11); the written material mostly frequently mentioned by teachers was often related to behaviour management or was based on adult-led activity-based play (both of which are grounded in easily understood outcomes). There is however a wealth of good quality written material on play and playing generated within the playwork sector that schools might find would provide them with a solution to the dichotomy noted above but knowledge of this material and of playwork in general, was low amongst those interviewed.

Most adults interviewed in the first part of the evaluation had not previously considered the role of playtimes and lunchtimes in the wider school day. One of the greatest challenges in the project therefore would be to raise this issue and redefine what playtime was all about, and do so in a playwork context.

## Playlore and the ‘problem’ playtime

Many of the adults interviewed felt that children’s play has radically altered in recent generations and that in some respects today’s children simply did not know ‘how to play’. This was often linked to the belief that behaviour was poorer during playtimes and lunchtimes now than it had been in the past and that the TV and the computer game had robbed children of ‘imagination’ which had ultimately interfered with their ability to play (paragraph 6). The lack of playing that many of the adults reported in their interviews however did not fit the reality of the observation sessions nor the results of the children’s interviews which revealed a rich variety of play and games producing yet another

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dichotomy. Those interviewed may have been surprised to learn that this view that traditional games are dying out is itself traditional.

When Iona and Peter Opie, the great collectors and historians of children's folklore through the ages reported that,

"It is remarkable how much guesswork has been expended on classical, medieval, and Tudor pastimes, simply because the learned commentators in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, closeted in their studies, lacked the knowledge of the games their own children were playing in the sunshine outside their windows." (Opie & Opie 1969: viii)

they could easily have been describing the primary schools involved in the project. As a result, "In the present day we assume children to have lost the ability to entertain themselves, we become concerned, and are liable, by our concern, to make what is not true a reality." (Opie 1969: 16). The reasons for this are complex but at the simplest level adults seem to believe that the current generation of children do not play in the same way that they did when they were children and this view seems to have led successive generations of teachers to label playtime as a 'problem time'. Many of the class teachers interviewed actually spent little time on the playground as a result of the frequency of their duty rota; and once there they and the midday supervisors at their school had their attention occupied in dealing with problems. But this in itself does not fully explain the commonly expressed view early in the evaluation about the lack of playing.

The children's interviews give possible clues to a deeper reason for this. They reported that they saw adults as people who stopped you from playing (see paragraph 51) and many of the adult interventions observed during playtime and lunchtime did indeed result in play being stopped (see paragraph 41). Sometimes this was deliberate when, for example, an adult felt that a particular form of play was inappropriate sometimes missing the possibility that, "It is too easy to dismiss games based on television heroes as somehow inferior to older, more traditional games." (Blatchford 1989: 16). The boy who reported that he changed the name of the game *Bulldog* to *Quality Street* to avoid the game being banned for example might be surprised to learn that this is a common tactic of school children all over the country to avoid the same issue; and the adult trying to ban him from this rough game might be equally surprised to learn that the game was being played at least as long ago as 1839 (Opie & Opie 1969: 141) (see paragraph 50). If that does not make it a 'traditional game', what does?

Many of the forms of play observed during the evaluation taking place on the playground and the field did not involve much movement (paragraph 29) and movement catches the eye. Combine this with the practical role of supervision and with the finding that children deliberately played some of their favourite games out of eye-sight of supervising adults (especially play high in imaginative content, see paragraph 34 for example) and we seem to discover a deeper reason behind the adult perception of a lack of playing at their school: it seems it was happening all the time but they simply failed to see it because they were not looking for it. This conclusion fits well with the comments made by adults at the mid stage of the evaluation after they had had an opportunity to see the Pods in action. Not only did they notice children playing with the loose parts of the Pod but the 'focus' that the Pod provided opened their eyes to them noticing more play in other contexts too. This seems to have led them to understanding play in a way that more closely fitted a reality

(playing) that they could not see in the earlier stages of the project (paragraph 70). As a result they began to see what was already there, before the introduction of the Play Pod, in addition to the new opportunities provided by the Play Pod. This eye-opening must be seen as one of the most successful results of the Play Pods involvement in the school environment.

Although the children interviewed did not explicitly say they did not want adult involvement in their playtimes the general feeling was one of confusion over why adults should want to do so (see paragraph 52). The children felt that any further interaction with adults would simply stop them from doing what they were already doing, i.e. playing, and they did not seem to realise that the adults at their school did not generally understand what they were spending their time doing at playtime and lunchtime; nor did they realise that their teachers and midday supervisors often felt they were 'not playing much'. Their indifference to the Huff and Puff approach (paragraph 51) was based principally on the feeling that they did not need further adult intervention in their play.

Once the Play Pods had been in place for some time, however, not only did adults at the schools begin notice children playing, they also began to notice that they could do so without direct adult involvement (paragraph 68). The midday supervisors in particular quite often appreciated seeing the way the playworkers attached to the Pods during the first few weeks of use used a very hands-off (playwork) approach and this began to influence the way they operated, particularly in their approach to minor accidents (paragraph 42). Although most of the schools felt the need to apply a rota to the use of the Pod in the early stages, the combination of both the points above made them realise that not only was there no need for this but in some cases they also realised that a rota was a potential barrier to use (paragraph 77) .

## Rough and tumble play

After the initial curiosity and excitement around the Pod on its first arrival at a school (paragraph 56) all the schools in the project were reportedly taken aback at the degree of rough and tumble play that followed (paragraph 60) and there was some considerable concern expressed in some of the schools about what they had let themselves in for (this was so at one school in particular). That children, particularly boys, should engage in rough and tumble play should not have come as a surprise. Various researchers have noted that when confronted with new situations, materials and playmates the first act of children, particularly boys, will be to engage in rough and tumble play (see for example Michael J Boulton (1994); and as Peter K Smith points out rough and tumble play and play fighting are "culturally universal" (Smith 1995: 15).

In some cases adults were concerned about the possibility of accidents and injury caused by the rough and tumble play, particularly when parents became involved (paragraph 60). But equally they were concerned about what they saw as a breakdown in control and a perceived increase in violent behaviour. The school playground is, however, in some respects a harsh environment. The Opie's in their studies noted that, "... when children are herded together in the playground, which is where the educationalists and the psychologists and the social scientists gather to study them, their play is markedly more aggressive than when they play in the street or the wild places." (Opie 1969: 13). But this

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should also be seen in the context that rough and tumble play itself is not an outward show of aggression nor does it necessarily lead to more aggressive behaviour in the future.

Michael J Boulton for example points out that, "... it would appear that for many children, and especially boys, participation in rough and tumble play is to a large extent natural, and a source of pleasure. It does not appear that rough and tumble play is motivated by the same desire to inflict hurt or distress." (Boulton 1994: 55). In the school context however, it is understandable that adults might express concern at the sword fights that some of the materials in the Pod lent themselves too. Penny Holland writes that, "... policy and practice in relation to war, weapon and superhero play is dependant on a complex weave of feelings, attitudes, relationships and perceptions ..." (Holland 2003: 97). It is interesting to note that during her research into the topic of rough and tumble play in school and nursery settings for younger children she says that after the rules had been changed to allow rough and tumble play, "... the first three to four weeks of the change-over were challenging for all concerned. Noise levels and the amount of physical play spiralled and the situation ... sometimes felt chaotic." (Holland 2003: 50). This mirrors closely what a number of the adults in the Play Pod schools also reported (paragraph 60 again).

It would be fair to say that although the school staff may not have realised that rough and tumble play would at first increase dramatically, the playworkers attached to the Pod and the Play Pods project team did. They did not, however, communicate this likelihood to the schools in the first run. To their credit, the project team soon realised this was an issue and ensured that further schools were told that this would be the likely initial outcome on the arrival of the Pod. In all cases the schools also reported that after a time (which varied from school to school) rough and tumble play suddenly stopped (paragraph 61) and more complex forms of play involving construction, cooperation and pretence began. In this, the sequence of actions was again similar to that noted by Penny Holland who said of her own study that the situation eventually "settled down". She quotes one practitioner as saying, "... we have seen amazing imaginative extended games develop ... Children's games have not involved violence, just imagination running riot." (Holland 2003: 53).

Seeing this pattern of development in the use of the Pod at the first few schools enabled the project team to not only point out that the first effect of the Pod would be an increase in rough and tumble play, but also to point out that this would naturally come to end as the forms of play became more complex.

## Materials/Equipment/loose parts

The eventual drop-off of rough and tumble play and a development into construction, followed by dressing up and more complex role play was a sequence of developments that were seen at all the schools in the project (paragraph 63). Adults and children alike reported that they thought this clear development of playing was being driven by access to the materials now available to play with that could be found in the Pod. A number of adults noted that the inventiveness that their children displayed when building dens, for example, was amongst the most positive aspects of the project they had seen (paragraph 68). The early concerns expressed by some over the type of materials in the Pod seemed to have been overcome by seeing the way they were being used (paragraph 69).



Equally as often reported was the development of children moving from exploring material(s) independently to then forming small groups to engage in cooperative play. The quantity as well as the type of material was key to this happening. Schools often provide materials and equipment for children to play with at playtime and lunchtime but rarely provide enough for best use to be made of them. Peter K Smith for example reports that, "... toy availability [we could read the loose parts in the Play Pods for this] had a generally greater effect than space availability. With more toys, children broke up into smaller clusters to play with them. There was less aggression and less squabbling over popular items." (Smith 1995: 7)

On one occasion Smith and his team experimented with providing different items for children to play with, including on some days removing all manufactured 'toys' from the study area completely. He noted that,

"The children were rather surprised when only chairs, tables, climbing frames, and rocking boats were put out, but in fact quickly put these items to very imaginative uses – making 'trains' out of a line of chairs, 'dens' out of tables, turning chairs and tables upside-down to make spaceships, and so forth. A few children found this noisy and strange ... but most found this more 'adventure playground' atmosphere very exciting and responded to it with unusual creativity." (Smith 1995: 7).

Children interviewed for the evaluation reported similar excitement when asked about their favourite materials from the Pod and discussions about how they were used often turned into more of an ideas session for the coming playtime than a report of what they had done up to that point. The example of the spaceship/car in paragraph 82 is typical of the fluid nature of the materials and what effect this had on children playing.

As already noted, the use of 'loose parts' as the materials in the Pods was at first puzzling and concerning to some of the adults but access to loose parts rather than manufactured materials eventually went on to become another of the projects major successes. Simon Nicholson, who first proposed what has become regarded as the 'Theory of Loose Parts' in 1971 said, "In any environment both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it." (Nicholson 1971: 30). The loose parts are the variables so the success of the Play Pods rests greatly on having these loose parts (in this case flexible, junk materials) in sufficient quantity. Once the Pod had gone and the loose parts with it there was a natural tendency for some of the adults to see the success of the project as being solely based on access to the new materials/loose parts. The success was, however, more complex than this (as discussed in the next section). In some respects the 'Pod' could be, and was seen as merely a storage box for the loose parts but that would be to miss the point: the loose parts were the key to success and the Pod gave the loose parts a focus. A collection of bins filled with loose parts would not have had the same effect.

## The Role of the Adult and the child: child complex

As well as genuine puzzlement about the nature of the loose parts and the way in which they would/could be used, adults at the schools were in the early stages of the project unsure of exactly what their role would be (paragraph 19). This was especially true of the midday supervisors. However, many remarked during interviews in the later stages of the

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evaluation that they had found a new appreciation of the ability of their children to take control of their own play (paragraph 91). The importance of this 'self-direction' by children was recognised as important by many but generally not to the extent it possibly deserved.

Some of the comments made in interviews in the early stage of the evaluation, about the perceived loss of imaginative play on their playground, showed that the staff (mainly teaching staff) felt that the opportunity to pretend and the use of imagination while playing were extremely important. They generally agreed that their children had been able to play in imaginative ways with the loose parts while the Pod was in place and also generally appreciated the fact that the reason why this imaginative play may not have been possible in the past was largely because of a lack of such materials being previously available (paragraph 58). But as mentioned above in the section on materials, equipment and loose parts they generally felt that it was the loose parts themselves that were solely responsible for the dramatic increase they saw in imaginative play. What appears to have been more important to the success of the project in this context however were not the materials per se but how the materials were used.

Ole Fredrik Lillemyr describes imagination as a key to the success of play in a learning context, but sees the two, play and learning, as different because one deals with reality and the other with imagination. He points out that adults sometimes fail to see the connection between the two because, as discussed in the section above on defining play and playing, "The concept of play is not easily comparable to the concept of learning." (Lillemyr 2003: 134). He goes on to say that, "Children have in this concern an advantage in relation to adults, as they can more easily move from one sphere to the other, from reality to play, and back again" (Lillemyr 2003:128). Most of the adults interviewed saw an importance in the type of materials available to play with and they saw the benefits of children being able to play without direct adult involvement. Generally, they did not link these two things together.

The Opie's wrote that,

"Possibly because it is more difficult to find out about, let alone understand, we largely ignore the child-to-child complex, scarcely realising that however much children may need looking after they are also people going about their own business within their own society, and are fully capable of occupying themselves under the jurisdiction of their own code." (Opie 1969: v).

The presence of loose parts in sufficient quantity does not seem to have been the most decisive factor in promoting the imaginative and cooperative play that the adults reported being so positive: it was the combination of the loose parts and the absence of adult direction that was so important. In other words the experience was all the more powerful because their children were being left to their own devices (paragraph 83). Although many of the adults did notice their children playing cooperatively with those they had not played with before (paragraph 70) their lack of playwork knowledge prevented them from developing this link. The provision of opportunities to play, in mixed age groups and with an apparent lack of adult involvement, is classic playwork.

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## Using the Pod and loose parts for teaching the curriculum

The adults interviewed during the final stage of the evaluation felt that the effect of the Pod on playing had been very positive (paragraph 89) and reported that their children had been playing with the Pod right up until the last possible minute (paragraph 90). The positive comments made about turn taking, sharing and cooperation made at the mid stage of the evaluation were repeated often. Their reports on the effects on learning and/or the classroom at the end of the evaluation were however less positive (paragraph 98).

Asking the question, 'what effect if any have you seen in the classroom' often provoked long silences before an answer was attempted, and in group interviews, discussions between adults before answering. There was a significant split in the answers between different groups to this question. The majority of class teachers, for example, felt the Pod had had no significant effect on their classrooms however a majority of non-direct teaching staff (headteachers and classroom assistants for example) felt it had (paragraph 103).

The Play Pod project had, at an early stage in planning, discussed the possible effect on learning that the Pod might generate but rejected the idea of including this as an element to be measured in the evaluation (hence the purely qualitative way this question was put in interviews). But the split of answers to this question deserves some kind of explanation. One possibility is that the class teachers generally saw the Pod in use less than did any other member of staff and so it may have simply been in their minds less. However, a number of class teachers at various points during the evaluation made comments about positive aspects of the Pod use that *were* having an impact on their lessons, such as being able to settle the class down quicker than usual after lunchtime and fewer squabbles entering the classroom (paragraph 106). Many did not seem to equate this with an effect on their teaching, though.

The principle reason seems likely that class teachers were attempting to answer this question in the context of their *teaching* as opposed to their children *learning*. The day-to-day concern of these class teachers is to plan, prepare and carryout their lessons in a very direct way i.e. teach; those staff answering this question in a different way had a more indirect relationship in teaching than the class teacher and so have answered this question in a broader context. This seems to be reinforced by the finding that class teachers interviewed were less likely to raise the possibility of any link between learning that might take place outside on the playground (without them) and the learning inside the classroom (with them).

A number of comments made by some class teachers and two headteachers in interviews in the final stages of the evaluation revealed that they would like to see the Pod and loose parts being used as a teaching aid (paragraph 124). At first glance this appears to make perfect sense: any teacher worth their salt would adopt a methodology that they see motivating and interesting children into their practice and, as Janet Moyles points out, "A curriculum which sanctions and utilises play is more likely ... to provide well-balanced citizens of the future as well as happier children in the present." (Moyles 1994: 200). Happier children at school generally make more content learners so to adopt the success of the Play Pods more directly into teaching seems to make sense.

But this presents a significant challenge, both for the schools where this possibility was raised and for the Play Pods project team. As mentioned above a number of adults interviewed in the evaluation, although understanding the value of the loose parts approach to developing opportunities to play on the playground at lunchtime, still did not fully grasp that the reason why this approach was so successful was the combination of loose parts, mixed playmates, and a lack of adult direction. Adopting the same approach to 'teaching' is highly unlikely to produce the same results. There is simply a difference between teaching through play and learning through play: in the latter, play always takes place when, and because, there is no adult present.

Brian Sutton-Smith makes the points that, "It is a cliché in learning theory that the transfer of skill from one mode or response to another generally occurs only if there is an active attempt to make it do so." (Sutton-Smith 1997: 41). In other words, there were still a minority of teachers involved in the Play Pods project who seem to feel that learning would not effectively take place unless it was actively taught. This is the dichotomy present in the different approaches and understanding inherent in teaching and playwork first raised at the beginning of this discussion. Many of the adults in the schools finished the project having understood this point and recognised the value in the child: child complex, free choice and access to suitable amounts of loose parts; but a few did not. The reason for this seems to be in the conditioning of their training - *teachers teach*. The confusion seems to be less about a lack of understanding about play or playing but more about a lack of understanding the role of the adult in this process. This suggests an obvious challenge, and a possible opportunity, for the future of the Play Pods as a means of working.

## Conclusion

Most adults interviewed in the first part of the evaluation had not previously considered the role of playtimes and lunchtimes in the wider school day. This and the false perception of an apparent decline in (traditional) play and games can lead to the playground being labelled as a 'problem'. However, David Brown (himself a headteacher) writes, "If the activities of play areas can also be shown to constitute a constructive part of children's social development, moves to limit playtime in school, because such times pose problems of supervision or finance, may be counter-productive and short sighted." (Brown 1994: 49), One of the greatest challenges in the project therefore was to raise this issue and redefine what playtime was all about, and do so in a playwork context. The independent evaluation concludes that the project was successful in doing this and that this success led to the whole topic of play in the school environment taking on a new thinking.

Play is not easily comparable to learning but one leads to the other. Children, seem to understand this point more clearly than we adults do and in many respects it was watching what their children were doing with the Pod, backed up with an explanation of what they could see from the Pod project team that encouraged school staff to question their previous understanding. What might therefore have been previously seen as a part of the school day that is little but a 'problem' was shown to have the potential to bring about a real contribution beyond the playground and to the whole school day. The Play Pod project has therefore been an unqualified success

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## The Project Team

It was not a requirement of the independent evaluation to assess the practice of the project team and this report has not attempted to do so. However all members of the team and most members of the steering group were interviewed towards the latter stage of the evaluation. The purpose in these interviews was to explore their opinions on how the project was going and identify any agreements and/or disagreements with the evaluation results from both the children and adult interviews in the schools.

It should be remembered that no members of the project team saw the results of the independent evaluation until the very closing stages of the project.

### Initial contact with adults

The playworkers on the project team reported that the initial reaction they received in the schools differed between midday supervisors and teaching staff: the midday supervisors initially, "Took a step back... [and] were not very open to it" (playworker 1). Another said that they were concerned about "causalities" and staffing issues, "They felt they would not be able to cope with the numbers [of children]" (playworker 2) and "They needed a lot of reassurance. A lot was about what they were allowed to do and not ... [and] there was some discussion about 'rules' (Playworker 1).

Possibly as a result of this the midday supervisors in most schools were said to have, "Took a step back" (playworker 1) in the early stages of having a Pod but this was felt to have been a positive point and even though it sometimes, "... felt like more of us 'doing' and them 'watching' for three weeks" (playworker 1) this period of observing the playworkers in action was generally concluded to have helped give them the reassurance they needed and, "It helped them move from a traditional [supervisory] role to a more playwork focussed role" (playworker 3). One playworker, interviewed just after completing three weeks in one school, said that "They [the midday supervisors] have become much more relaxed" (playworker 4).

The reaction of the teaching staff was said to have been somewhat different. Generally, the playworkers reported that they came into direct contact with teachers infrequently but when they did they tended to voice concerns about what effect the Pod might have in terms of 'control' rather than the practical concerns raised by the midday supervisors. One felt that the Pod, "... was very much out of their comfort zone (playworker 4) and another said, "I don't think some of the teaching staff in particular understood the culture change that would take place" (play officer). This seems to concur with some of the comments made by a number of headteachers and at least one class teacher during the evaluation in relation to the initial training input being given to midday supervisors only. This was not an obvious point and it took some time for the project team to realise the implications of this. The result however was a move to tighten up the informal contract of responsibilities between the project and subsequent schools.

The importance of involving playworkers in the initial weeks of a Pod being placed at a school had been considered during the planning stage of the project. One member of the

steering committee said that, “[I thought] The benefits of playworker involvement would be [the school staff] seeing the children playing with the scrap [loose parts] and the chaos that would happen but also seeing what effect having adults around would have on what would happen” (play officer). This seems to have been proved correct. In their interviews the project staff also seemed to be saying much the same that the midday supervisors and the headteachers had during their interviews in terms of concerns over supervision and safety, and similarly with the teaching staff in their concern over control issues. The members of the project team had clearly thought through these issues and had incorporated what they had learnt from working with the adults in the first group into the subsequent schools.

## Initial contact with children

Not all the playworkers on the project team had worked in a school environment before the Play Pod project and so were unsure themselves over what the initial reaction might be from children. A number spoke about their surprise however that adults at the schools felt that their children often ‘did not know how to play’. One of the steering group said, “We are learning more about this too but clearly if children are given the materials they have the innate skills to use them” (play officer).

There was no real surprise about rough and tumble play being amongst the first reaction from children on access to the loose parts. The playworkers had also noticed that, “The older ones were quite rough from the start, the little ones not so. But it cooled off. The aggressive stuff went when people started making dens” (playworker 4). This playworker went on to say, “We didn’t remove the ‘weapons’, we just helped them see what else could be done.” This also agrees with comments made in the evaluations at the schools.

The playworkers had a different idea of packing away materials at the end of a session than the midday supervisors had early on and noted that, “Most [midday supervisors] seemed to prefer the idea of tidying up and some appointed monitors to help with this, but they soon disappeared! Most [midday supervisors] gave up in the end” (playworker 2). This confirms much of what children said in their interviews when they too complained of people mysteriously disappearing shortly before the need to pack away came around. Also in common with the children interviewed the playworkers agreed that, “The kids liked the idea of having to hunt for stuff” (playworker 4) and that this was a contributing factor to the eventual tactic of just throwing everything back in the Pod at the end of a session; however they felt that a significant number of the midday supervisors were still a little uncomfortable with this tactic even by the end of the project. Evaluation interviews with the midday supervisors however seems to suggest the midday supervisors were much more relaxed about this than the playworkers thought.

## Learning

The members of the steering group seemed to share a similar broad view of ‘learning’ to that of the headteachers and some of the support staff interviewed during the evaluation. One expressed early on that there would be opportunities for using language and “developing narrative” (play officer) and this did turn out to be true. For example, one of the

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playworkers reported that a class teacher at one of the schools mentioned seeing a group of children building a den which they then used as a centre for pretend play that was clearly based on a story that had been read in the classroom, “The teacher said that the children in this group showed a level of understanding that she had not seen in the classroom” (playworker 1).

All those on the project team and steering group were very clear about the role of the project in terms of learning which was, as one said, “Not so much a tool for targets in the curriculum as about an ability to learn” (play officer). In this respect the project team and the steering group were proved correct in their feeling that the Pods would provide support to learning in a broad context rather than hard, measurable curriculum outcomes. Their decision not to promote or steer the project down this latter route proved a positive move.

## On-going changes, developments and learning

It was agreed at the start of the independent evaluation that there would be no direct contact between the evaluator and the project team until the latter stages of the project but an exception to this rule would be made if something were raised during interviews or observations that was felt to be important enough to bring to their attention. This did happen on a small number of occasions (for example, interviews with children in the mid-stage of the evaluation suggested that more thought needed to be given to the effect that might be felt by them on their Pod being finally being taken away). It was noticeable however that on each of these limited occasions the project team had already noted the issue and were working on it. The whole project team were clearly learning themselves as the project progressed and were very effectively building that learning into their practice as well as thinking ahead.

For example, some of the playworkers questioned whether working in a school every day for three weeks was as effective as maybe encouraging the midday supervisors to become gradually more involved and then to ‘slacken off’ the playworker involvement (playworkers 1 and 3). The management members of the project team were also learning and developing as the project progressed. At one school, for example, the location chosen for placing the Pod was felt unsuitable from the beginning but pressure from the headteacher led to it being placed there anyway, “I was not happy about the location of the Pod ... and would have challenged the decision but I didn’t feel confident enough at that early stage” (management) but this led directly to a change of policy and more control being taken over where future Pods would be placed.

## Preparing for the end

What would happen as the whole project came close to completion had begun to occupy members of the project team by the mid-stage of the evaluation. This had been reinforced by the project team having seen what kind of effect the loss of their Pod had already had on the first three schools. One said, “We didn’t appreciate this fully early on” (playworker 4) and another said, “We need to give more consideration to give support after the Pods have gone. We need to meet with the LEAs [Local Education Authorities]. We need to have a

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package in place” (management). The headteachers of all the schools involved had also been considering this point.

Although at least one of the schools had already expressed a desire to purchase a permanent, replacement Pod soon after losing theirs the requirements of the evaluation meant that there had to be a period of at least twelve weeks without the Pod in order to assess what happened once it had been removed. Many of the project team clearly agonised over this but to their credit they persevered for the sake of the evaluation.

Having seen how effective having a Pod had been in a school the project team were also clearly concerned over the longer term effects of having had and then lost one. They were beginning to show a great attachment to their project and empathise closely with their users. They discussed various ways around this including simply leaving collections of junk loose parts with each school. They all agreed, however, that the best solution of all was not to remove the Pods.

## Final Remarks

The combined approach of providing loose parts, the focus of the Play Pod, the training element, conscious awareness raising, and playworkers operating in support of the midday supervisors have proved to be very effective. The project has:

- achieved and in many cases gone beyond the outcomes agreed upon with the Big Lottery and satisfied the needs of the local authority play officers (see Meeting the Outcomes in Part 1)
- been positively received by all the schools that have taken part and opened their eyes to new possibilities (see the Results in Part 2)
- contributed to the debate on play, playing and the importance of playtimes/lunchtimes as a valuable part of the school day (see the Discussion of Results in Part 2)
- and, possibly most importantly of all, brought a great deal of enjoyment to a lot of children.

There was general agreement among the members of the project team that involvement in the Play Pods had not only been highly beneficial for the schools involved but also for their own practice as professional playworkers; this was the conclusion of the project management too. One said, for example, “It has been worth it. I can’t think of anything more fun to have been involved with. It has developed a life all of its own and it’s has taught all of us something” (management).

The project team and the steering group have proved themselves very effective in planning and delivering a truly unique project during the process of which they themselves have learned, adapted and developed. As a result the project should not be seen as a novel one-off experiment – quite simply it should be seen as the norm.



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## Play Pods in Schools: an independent evaluation

### Notes on accident book entries

It was intended within the independent evaluation of the Play Pods project to make a detailed study of the accident book entries in each of the schools taking part before, during and after their time with a Pod. In practice this proved very difficult to do (see Limitations of the Methodology in Part 1 of this report). The sheer amount of information collected was unexpected. More problematic was the variation in recording method from school to school which had also not been expected. However, the material that was collected did provide enough detail to reach some broad conclusions and these are presented here as an Appendices to the main report.

1. Bumps and Trips accounted for by far the greater number of recorded accidents by type, with trips being slightly higher. For example, in the nine months before the Play Pod was introduced at (school 4) bumps and trips accounted for 56% of the total accidents recorded; trips accounted for 29.5% of the total and bumps 26%.
2. Accidents involving key stage 1 (KS1) children were generally more frequent than for key stage 2 (KS2) and in most cases the frequency of trip and bump accidents was higher for KS1 than KS2. For example, in the nine months before the arrival of the Play Pod at (school 2) bumps and trips accounted for 57% of all recorded accidents at KS2 but totalled 81% of recorded accidents at KS1.
3. The majority of accidents recorded took place on the hard, flat playground surface rather than on the field or on fixed play equipment where present (but see note 7 below). For example, (school 4) recorded only two accidents taking place on the school field and three accidents on their climbing equipment from a total of more than sixty recorded accidents over a nine month period.
4. The majority of accidents recorded occurred outside the school buildings although a significant number occurred inside (see note 7 below again). This varied from school to school. For example, (school 1) recorded a total of twenty-one bumps outside the school buildings and twelve inside (KS2 children) over the nine months before their Play Pod arrived; seven of these occurred during PE lessons. Accidents involving doors, such as trapped fingers, were mentioned in almost all schools.
5. A small number of recorded accidents recorded involved being hit by objects, such as a football for example, but these were generally considered to be accidental rather than deliberate on the part of another child. There were exceptions with occasional recordings of fights and squabbles but these were extremely rare. At (school 4) for example there was one entry for 'punched by [key stage 2 boy]' out of more than sixty recorded accidents. 'Being kicked' was more common however, there were three recorded entries for this at (school 4) but as in most schools it was not always clear if these were deliberate or accidental.

6. Schools varied considerably in the frequency and type of accidents they recorded as well as the method they used for recording. Of the accident books examined in the eight primary schools there were four unique methods of recording in use and significant variations in two of the remainder. This was despite the fact that four of the schools used the same pre-printed record book for their accident entries. The detail attached to each record varied considerably and two schools appeared to record any and all accidents no matter how minor. One of these schools for example recorded more than two-hundred accidents over the nine month period before receiving their Play Pod whereas a second with a comparable roll of children recorded only around sixty.
7. Schools did not generally record or analyse where recorded accidents took place or the context in which they occurred. This was not true in all cases but even where a location was given it was usually restricted to descriptions such as, 'in KS1 playground' and 'on the apparatus' for example. This was less so for accidents recorded indoors as often a specific classroom was mentioned or more often the PE hall.
8. There were recorded accidents relating specifically to the use of the Play Pods whilst they were in a school. These varied with the majority recorded being in the early stages of the Pod being in place and mainly involved children being hit by others with scrap materials during rough and tumble play. There were two accidents involving Pod material that were considered to be more serious both from the same school and both involving loose parts that had been attached to the schools climbing equipment. In all these cases the number of bump and trips accidents, although greatly reduced, was still by far the most common accident recorded whilst the Pods were in place. For example, (school 2) recorded six accidents relating to the Pod while in place which were two examples of children falling or being accidentally pushed out of the Pod; two being hit with tubes during rough and tumble play; and two being hit by objects thrown, in one case a 'disc' and in the other some 'cardboard' (all in the first three weeks). This accounted for around one-quarter of the non-trip/bump accidents recorded.
9. There appears to have been a reduction in recorded accidents and incidents taking place during the time the Play Pods were present at all eight schools in the evaluation. In (school 3) for example there had been an average of three or more recorded accidents per lunchtime period in the school year leading up to the Pod being in place; for the twelve weeks the Pod was at the school the average number recorded was two or fewer per lunchtime period (in addition, the headteacher at this school reported that although there had been more than one dozen entries in the 'behaviour book' in the twelve weeks before the Pod, some of which related to accident book entries, there were no entries at all for the twelve weeks whilst the Pod was in place). The recorded accidents at this school in the twelve week period after the Pod had left was almost the same as the previous period when the Pod was in place. These results were typical across the eight schools.