

ANTOINE BREAU\*, VANESSA LENTILLON-KAESTNER\*

AND DOLORS RIBALTA ALCADE\*\*

*antoine.breau@hepl.ch – vanessa.lentillon-kaestner@hepl.ch – modolorsra@blanquerna.url.edu*

\* Training and research unit in physical and sports education, University of Teacher Education of State of Vaud, Lausanne, Switzerland

\*\* Faculty of Psychology, Education Sciences and Sport, University Ramon Llull Blanquerna, Barcelona, Spain

## Chapter 11: Football, Dance, Dolls and Toy Cars: Comparative Analysis Between Switzerland and Spain in Relation to Gender Stereotypes Among Primary School Pupils

### **Abstract**

Carried out in the context of a PEERS project between Lausanne and Barcelona, the aim of this study was to compare the place of gender stereotypes among young pupils educated in Swiss and Spanish schools. These stereotypes were measured in relation to sporting activities (football and dance) and in relation to toys (dolls and toy cars). Questionnaires were distributed to the pupils of both countries ( $n = 120$ ) and focus groups were set up ( $n = 9$ ). The results show that a large majority of pupils adhere to gender stereotypes and that they separate activities into two categories: male (football and toy cars) and female (dance and dolls). Some differences emerge between the two countries, the Spanish pupils adhering to gender stereotypes in a more pronounced way than the Swiss. At school, action against stereotypes should be developed to allow each and every pupil to engage freely and confidently in all activities.

## 1. Introduction

At an international level, the issue of gender in school has become a “crucial topic” (Eurydice Report, 2010, p. 3), particularly in light of persistent inequalities between girls and boys in schools. This chapter looks at the role of gender stereotypes in young pupils enrolled at primary level. Stereotypes play a role in gender socialization and in the construction of the gender identity of the male and female citizen of tomorrow. The study conducted here looks at gender stereotypes in sport and physical activities and with regard to toys, two main vectors of gender socialization (Dafflon-Novelle, 2006; Rouyer, Mieyaa & Le Blanc, 2014). Developed within the framework of a PEERS project between Lausanne (University of Teacher Education of State of Vaud) and Barcelona (Universitat Ramon Llull) (Bréau, 2015, 2016), an international comparison was performed between Switzerland and Spain, two countries seeking to promote gender equality in school and more broadly in society (Baena-Extremera & Ruiz-Montero, 2009; Chaponnière, 2011).

## 2. Gender Socialization, a Complex Process

Throughout life, each individual is required to internalize social norms and codes relating to the masculine and feminine. Gradually, everyone learns to navigate in a “gendered” world, a binary world where a difference is made between masculinity and femininity, men and women, boys and girls (Butler, 2004). Gender socialization refers to learning “gender roles,” different and stereotypical roles (Bereni & al., 2008). Some behavior patterns, gestures or ways of expressing emotions will thus be privileged or rejected depending on the child’s gender. The dissemination of gender norms and the construction of “stereotypical roles” takes place mainly through various socializing agents such as family, school,

peer groups, or the media (Hyde & Jaffee, 2000). The family is the first place in which children experience a gender difference (Corsaro, 2005; Rouyer & Zaouche-Gaudron, 2006). Very quickly, parents will create a specific environment for each gender, whether in terms of clothes, decoration or toys for their children. Girls and boys are raised in a differentiated manner, consistent with gender stereotypes, especially in the first years of life (McHale, Crouter & Whiteman, 2003). Within the school, different treatment appears early. Girls learn to be better organized, more attentive in class, and more respectful of school rules than boys (Van de Gaer & al., 2006). Adherence to gender stereotypes thus tends to become stronger in school (Bréau & Lentillon-Kaestner, 2016; De Boissieu, 2009; Zaidman, 1996).

### 3. The Construction of the Gender Identity of the Child: Some Developmental Landmarks

Gender identity is understood as the feeling of belonging to one gender and the sense of our masculinity and our femininity (Chiland, 2003). The construction of gender identity takes place in a longitudinal perspective (Leaper & Friedman, 2006) and refers to the different stages through which a child will pass to build their identity as a boy or as a girl within their culture (Le Maner-Idrissi, 1997). Gender, along with age, is one of the first two social categories used by children to understand the world around them (Bem, 1981). Thus, even when only a few months old, babies are able to distinguish between individuals of different genders. Children then go on to access knowledge of gendered roles and objects (Ruble & Martin, 1998). Gradually every child, boy, and girl organizes their environment on the basis of the “masculine/feminine” dichotomy and develops a kind of gender diagram (Le Maner-Idrissi & Renault, 2006). As far as the evolution of knowledge on gender and on gender roles is concerned, some cognitive theories stress the presence of different stages during childhood (Kohlberg, 1966; Martin & Halverson,

1981). From the age of five, children enter the stage of “gender stability.” Children perceive compliance with gendered roles as “morally right” (Mieyaa & Rouyer, 2010, p. 4) and will tend to show a certain rigidity in their behavior and their representations. During this stage, children feel that violations of gender roles are unacceptable. The tendency to play with gender-typed toys and gendered segregation in games between peers continues to increase during this period (Maccoby, 1990). Around the age of seven, the child will enter the so-called “gender constancy” stage. They understand that the gender of an individual is a biological given, and that membership of a gender group remains stable beyond time and situations. Some children may well begin to question the validity of gender roles, and gradually withdraw from certain gender standards and a “morally right” compliance (Golombok & Fivush, 1994). In this regard, it is important not to reduce the construction of gender identity to a mere social construction. Children do not simply internalize gender stereotypes or other gender roles at a cognitive level with varying degrees of passivity; they use and modify them to suit their personal stories. It is thus a construction in which the subject is actively involved (Owen Blakemore, Berenbaum & Liben, 2009; Rouyer & Zaouche-Gaudron, 2006). The construction of gender identity is thus divided between a process of acculturation and a process of personalization (Malrieu, 2003). It is therefore necessary to analyze the construction of gender identity within an integrative perspective that takes into account sociological, cognitive, but also affective elements (Rouyer, 2007).

#### 4. Gender Stereotypes

In general, stereotypes refer to a set of rigid or even caricatural beliefs about certain characteristics of a social group. When it comes to men and women, from birth we learn and access different gender stereotypes (e.g., a boy does not cry, pink is for girls), defined as a range “*of signals that combine character traits, skills, attitudes to one gender over another*

*and that shape our view of the place and role of men and women in our society*” (Costes, Houadec & Lizan, 2008, p. 59). Gender stereotypes contribute to the construction of a binary, sexed and differentiated world. At school, some school subjects are considered more suited to boys or to girls. The teachers’ efforts to stimulate their pupils and their expectations of success rest unconsciously on these stereotypes (Duru-Bellat, 2011). Gender stereotypes become a brake for the academic success of the pupils, their sense of competence, or their taste for certain activities or school subjects (Bouchard & Saint-Amant, 1996). Finally, they represent real obstacles to individual choices, for both men and women, and contribute to the persistence of gender inequalities (Bréau & Lentillon-Kaestner, 2016).

#### *4.1 Gender Stereotypes in Sport and Physical Activity*

Sport is often described as the “stronghold of masculinity” (Elias & Dunning, 1994) and many gender stereotypes are still prevalent (Hively & El Alayli, 2014; Knight & Giuliano, 2001). Because of its history and its representations, sport is seen as a thoroughly masculine activity (Hargreaves, 1994). It contributes to the formation and reproduction of a dualist definition of the feminine and masculine physique, where girls are considered to be weaker than boys (Lentillon, 2009). Depending on their intrinsic characteristics, the different physical activities and sports are the subject of a sexual marking (Fontayne, Sarrazin & Famose, 2001). Male sports (football, boxing, rugby, martial arts) tend to involve features such as physical contact, opposition, and strength, whereas women’s sports (dance, gymnastics, aerobics) entail more expression, grace, and aesthetics (Hardin & Greer, 2009). Indeed, there is no doubt about the feminine credentials of dance and gymnastics in the minds of young pupils (Dowling Naess, 2001; Gorely, Holroyd & Kirk, 2003). Other activities such as badminton or swimming are considered neutral, as suitable for both sexes. At school, physical education and sports classes (PE) seem to perpetuate this stereotyping and division between the masculine and the feminine (Fagrell, Larsson & Redelius, 2012). While teachers tend

to turn more to boys to perform demonstrations, studies also point to the continued use of stereotyped expressions that can ridicule the pupils, especially girls (Castillo, 2009; Rónholt, 2002). In Spain, activities that combine strength, speed, and endurance are primarily offered to boys while girls take part in coordination activities (Valdivia & al., 2010). As regards the role of the family, parents tend to encourage boys to engage in physical activities and see them as being significantly more proficient at sports than girls (Bois & Sarrazin, 2006; Fredericks & Eccles, 2005).

#### *4.2 Gender Stereotypes in Relation to Toys*

During the first years of life, toys are one of the main vectors of gender socialization, in particular through the transmission of stereotypes (Fisher, 2006; Rouyer & Robert, 2010). They thus contribute to the construction of a child's gender identity and towards the separation between masculinity and femininity. Early on, differences emerge in the behavior of girls and boys, especially in the choice of toys (Cherney, Harper & Winter, 2006; Le Maner-Idrissi & Renault, 2006). Cars, boats, and flying objects become specific to boys as the girls continue to play with dolls and dolls' tea sets (Zegai, 2010). A real separation of the genders in the toy universe is thus present and tends to become stronger and stronger. Girls, however, seem to have more freedom than boys, and can more easily play games with the opposite sex. For boys, liking feminine activities seems to cast doubt on their sexual preferences. Some find themselves quickly "snatched away" from the dolls' house (Collet, 2011).

#### *4.3 Gender Stereotypes in Young Swiss and Spanish Pupils: What Do They Have to Say?*

Today, few studies have considered the views of young pupils when it comes to gender stereotypes (Rouyer & Robert, 2010). Yet hearing what the child has to say is an innovative and relevant investigative

approach from both a theoretical and methodological viewpoint (Mieyaa, Rouyer & Le Blanc, 2010). Focus groups are a particularly effective tool to explore the views of young children (Morgan & al., 2002). The study proposed here has focused solely on the views of young boys and girls about different gender stereotypes in relation to sports and toys. The implementation of this research project was based on a PEERS project, bringing together for one academic year students and teacher-researchers from both countries (Bréau, 2015, 2016). An international comparison was conducted between Switzerland and Spain, two countries eager to strengthen gender equality in schools. In Switzerland, some inequalities and gender stereotypes remain present within the education system (e.g., Bréau & Lentillon-Kaestner, 2017; Chaponnière, 2011; Fassa, 2013). The career choices of young people of both sexes thus remain very stereotypical (Gianettoni, 2011). In Spain, some sexist barriers remain in place within society with the dissemination of a patriarchal model that conveys men as the head of the household (Valdivia & al., 2010). The school participates in the reproduction of a separate and stereotyped model (Castillo Andrés & al., 2012) and many actions are being set up to promote better gender equality (Colás, 2007).

## 5. Method

### *5.1 Sample*

In our study, the pupils surveyed through the questionnaires and focus groups were all volunteer pupils, enrolled in Swiss or Spanish primary schools. As regards the questionnaires, 120 pupils participated in the study (55 boys and 65 girls). A total of 74 questionnaires were collected in Switzerland and 46 in Spain. As for the focus groups, 36 pupils participated in the interviews. Twenty-four (12 boys and 12 girls) were enrolled in Swiss schools and 12 (6 boys and 6 girls) in Spanish schools

(Table 1). All pupils interviewed were between 4 and 7 years of age ( $M = 5.9$ ,  $ET = 0.96$ ).

Table 1. Distribution of pupils surveyed by country and the tool used.

	<i>Questionnaires</i>	<i>Focus Groups</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Switzerland (%)</b>	74 (61.66)	24 (66.66)	98 (62.82)
<b>Spain (%)</b>	46 (38.33)	12 (33.33)	58 (37.17)
<b>Total (%)</b>	120 (100)	36 (100)	156 (100)

## 5.2 Data collection tools

A mixed method was used for this study with the collection of questionnaires and the setting up of focus groups with young pupils. The development of data collection tools was carried out during the first PEERS exchange week in Barcelona.

**Questionnaires.** The place of gender stereotypes among primary school pupils was first measured by asking them to answer a questionnaire. This was comprised primarily of closed questions. Twenty-seven questions were put to the pupils, questions divided into two different areas: physical and sporting activities and toys. To facilitate the understanding of the participants, each question was accompanied by an image. For all the questions, the pupils interviewed were asked whether the activity presented was more for girls (1), for both (2) or for boys (3).

**Focus groups.** The aim of the focus groups was to access more accurately the point of view of the pupils about different activities. The focus groups were conducted using a stimulus (pictures showing different toys or sporting activities) that aimed to trigger an exchange of ideas or opinions among participants. First of all, the pupils were asked to tell the researcher whether they thought that the activity presented in the form of images was more for boys, for girls, or for both genders. Then, the researcher presented new images to the pupils, images contrasting with the gender stereotypes (e.g., a girl playing football, boys playing with



dolls) and invited them to share their opinion (“Is it normal?,” “Have you ever seen boys playing with dolls?”).

### 5.3 Procedure

The objectives of this study and the various data collection tools were first presented to various schools and school principals to find volunteer teachers to participate in this study. The data collection took place between November 2014 and March 2015, just after the tools were developed in Barcelona and before the second PEERS meeting in Lausanne.

**Questionnaires.** Pre-tests were conducted with ten or so pupils to ensure the correct understanding of all the questions. The questionnaire was conducted in seven different schools (four in Switzerland and three in Spain). The pupils were invited to answer questions at the beginning of the physical education and sports lesson in the joint presence of the researcher and the class teacher. It took on average between 15 and 20 minutes to answer the questionnaire. The presence of the researcher made it possible to answer any questions asked by the pupils. The questionnaires were then collected straight after being completed.

**Focus groups.** A total of nine focus groups were conducted with pupils from the canton of Vaud in Switzerland ( $n = 6$ ), and from Barcelona in Spain ( $n = 3$ ). All these focus groups were filmed. They took place during school hours in a neutral place (a classroom), chosen by the researchers, and in a relaxed atmosphere. Of the nine focus groups, seven were conducted in a mixed context, one with just boys, and another with just girls. The pupils were reassured at the beginning of the session that anonymity and all opinions would be respected. A sufficiently large number of pupils was convened (between three and six pupils) to promote interactions (Kitzinger, Markova & Kalampalikis, 2004). Each focus group lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. Two researchers were systematically present during the interview (a facilitator and an observer). The role of the facilitator was to facilitate the focus group and encourage participants to give their views, namely by creating a climate of confidence. The observer was present to ensure proper operation of

the recording equipment and to pick up on “key words” or other “non-verbal behavior” observed in the focus group and likely to be used in the thematic analysis. However, the observer had to be neutral, with no participation in the debate.

#### 5.4 Data analysis

Two independent variables were taken into account in the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data: the gender of the pupils (male or female) and the country in which they are educated (Switzerland and Spain). The analysis of the data was carried out in particular at the second PEERS meeting in Lausanne in March 2015.

**Questionnaires.** One-factor ANOVAs (Analyses of Variance) were applied to data from the questionnaires using SPSS software version 22. The significance threshold retained was  $p < 0.05$ .

**Focus groups.** The recordings were transcribed in full. The analysis was primarily based on the verbatim accounts but also on the notes of the observer. The interviews were the subject of several readings and the researcher conducted a thematic content analysis (Mucchielli, 1998) to highlight different themes related to the role of gender stereotypes in sport and physical activities and toys. In the course of the readings, the data could thus be classified into categories and subcategories. Two main categories emerged from the content analysis: the views of pupils about physical activity and sports, toys, and their relationship towards masculinity and/or femininity, and the various arguments used by the pupils to justify their views (experience, family, school).

## 6. Results

### 6.1 Physical and sporting activities

#### ***Football: A primarily male activity, both in Spain and in Switzerland.***

The answers given to the questionnaires show that pupils from both countries consider football as a male sport. The Spanish pupils, however, show a higher average ( $M = 2.73$ ) than the Swiss students ( $M = 2.45$ ),  $F(1, 119) = 5.80$ ,  $p = 0.01$ . Spanish boys consider football as a more masculine activity ( $M = 2.79$ ) than Swiss boys ( $M = 2.48$ ),  $F(1, 53) = 5.80$ ,  $p = 0.01$ . Among the girls, the same observation can be made ( $M = 2.68$  vs  $2.44$ ),  $F(1, 63) = 3.43$ ,  $p = 0.06$ . Within the focus groups conducted in Spain, of 12 students interviewed, 9 said that football was for boys (“Oh, football is our thing,” Lucas). Only two girls explain that girls “can play” (Elisa) and that “it is a sport for both” (Lamara). In Switzerland, the pupils also ranked football as a primarily male activity (20 out of 24 pupils). Some boys even admit that playing football with girls “is weird, because normally girls don’t play football” (Luc). Only two Swiss boys explained that girls also play football. The girls willingly recognize that football is rather masculine. In particular, they explain that boys are “stronger” (Marine). Two girls point out that they have as much right to play as boys, even if they admit that “not many girls play football. Only boys. We are more used to seeing boys play” (Pauline).

In both countries, some boys admitted that girls could play with them. For Andre, “girls can play sometimes.” The Spanish pupil explains, however, that boys are better at football. Lucas shared this observation: “I know a girl who plays but not as well as I do.” In Switzerland, during a focus group conducted only with boys, silence fell when the image showed a girl playing football. The pupils quickly talked about break time and “girls who never play,” “it doesn’t exist” (Jacques). While some girls admit that they do not play during break time, others explain that the problem in school is that “the boys don’t let them play” (Charlotte).

**Dance: An activity for girls, especially in Spain.** The Spanish pupils classify dance as a feminine activity ( $M = 1.15$ ), while the Swiss pupils see it more as an activity for both genders ( $M = 1.75$ ),  $F(1, 118) = 41.39$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . This finding re-emerges in the answers of the girls, both in Spain and Switzerland ( $M = 1.04$  vs.  $1.69$ ),  $F(1, 63) = 38.90$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . The Spanish boys also share this view with respect to the Swiss boys that associate dance rather as an activity for both sexes ( $M = 1.25$  vs  $1.83$ ),  $F(1, 53) = 13.29$ ,  $p = 0.01$ . In the focus groups, the differences in answers between pupils of the two countries are narrower. Very quickly the finding that dance is a female activity emerged. Of the 36 pupils surveyed in total (Switzerland and Spain), 30 consider that dancing is for girls. As for Spanish boys, dance is “something feminine” (Andre). Only four boys in the two countries combined cite dance as a neutral activity. The girls share this view and explain in particular that there are always more girls doing dance. Even if “it’s not prohibited, dance is a lot more for girls than for boys” (Charlotte).

**Boys who dance: Between laughter and shame.** When the researcher mentions the possibility for the boys to dance, some Spaniards say they “would be ashamed,” and “would be embarrassed” (Lucas). In Switzerland, this view is shared with, in particular, the fear of having “to dress like a girl” (Christophe). In three of the focus groups conducted, the image of a boy dancing triggered silence and mockery. For Luc, boys who dance, “means that they’re a bit barmy.” For the girls, seeing boys dancing “is weird” (Lucie) but “it’s not forbidden” (Pauline).

## 6.2 Toys

**Dolls: A symbol of the feminine universe.** The Spanish pupils do not hesitate to classify dolls as a female toy ( $M = 1.21$ ) while the Swiss pupils associate them rather with a toy for both sexes ( $M = 1.55$ ),  $F(1, 119) = 9, 95$ ,  $p = 0.02$ . These differences are confirmed in the comparison between the genders, especially among Spanish boys who believe that playing with dolls is primarily a female activity ( $M = 1.12$  vs  $1.71$ ),  $F(1, 53) = 11.66$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Among the girls, the results of the questionnaires

show no significant differences,  $F(1, 63) = 0.91, p = 0.34$ . Within the focus groups, playing with dolls quickly emerged as an activity for girls, both in Spain and Switzerland. All pupils shared this finding. It's "100 % for girls" (Jacques), "of course it's for girls" (Andre), "sure and certain" (Elisa), "all girls like Barbies" (Christophe). Only one boy said he had already played with Barbies with his sister. In Switzerland, one pupil defended the interests of playing with dolls to "learn to be a mummy, learn to babysit" (Mélanie).

***Being a boy and playing with dolls.*** When pupils saw the image of a boy with a doll, they pulled faces and started laughing: "now that's funny" (Eric), "yuck especially not Barbies" (Luis). Very quickly some boys said they never played with dolls. While some pupils found it to be "original" (Luc), others preferred to say that it was "bizarre, it's not normal for a boy to play with a doll" (Charlotte). The pupil draws in particular on the example of the parents: "Daddies aren't mummies, I've never seen a daddy looking after a baby." These different remarks were shared by a majority of pupils, both Swiss and Spanish, boys and girls.

***Toy cars: A decidedly masculine space.*** The questionnaire results show no significant differences between the Swiss and Spanish pupils when it comes to toy cars,  $F(1, 119) = 2.45, p = 0.12$ . During the focus groups, in both surveyed countries, playing with toy cars emerged as a male activity. All the boys said they played or had played with toy cars. Few girls said that they spent time playing with this type of toy: "Girls can play but it's the boys who like playing and often girls don't enjoy it much" (Mélanie). In Spain, Lucas explains that while "girls can play, it's not really for girls," "it's more for boys" (Elisa), "it's not very feminine" (Andre). Finally, it emerged from the focus groups that while girls can play, "they have the right but just for a while" (Jacques).

## 7. Discussion

It emerges from this study that gender stereotypes in connection with sporting activities and toys are already entrenched among pupils aged between four and seven years old in a primary school environment. Whatever the image shown (football, dancing, dolls, and toy cars), the Swiss and Spanish pupils make a distinction between the activities and contribute to maintaining the division between male and female (Butler, 2004). The stereotyped comments made by a large majority of pupils confirm the work done on the construction of gender identity, in particular the “gender stability” stage (Kohlberg, 1966; Martin & Halverson, 1981). The answers given by the pupils translate their willingness to respect the norms and gender roles (Mieyaa & Rouyer, 2010). Differences in answers were observed between the two countries, particularly in terms of the questionnaires, the Spanish pupils adhering more strongly to different gender stereotypes. These results finally confirm the importance for this country to continue the reflection and the fight against sexism present in schools and in society at large (Valdivia & al., 2010).

Regarding the physical and sports activities, the answers given and comments made by the pupils confirm a gender separation of practices (Hardin & Greer, 2009). A large majority of students thus describe football as a masculine activity. The girls stand back and do not get very involved in this activity, neither in Spain nor Switzerland. This finding is widely echoed in the work highlighting the lack of girls’ participation in collective activities (Davisse, 2010; Vigneron, 2006). While mixed football teams present challenges (Moreno, 2006), it seems essential to continue the reflection on the content and assessment of team sports (Baena-Extremera & Ruiz Montero, 2009). A better distribution of roles on the ground between pupils is one way in which teachers can intervene, valuing girls’ actions and allowing them to develop in not only peripheral roles (e.g., goalkeeper, defender) (Vigneron, 2006). Rethinking the participation of girls in football also means enabling them to acquire new skills and a stronger sense of

competence (Pontais, 2013). In contact with the boys, Le Goff (2002) proposes the setting up of mixed teams in football, but also in other activities (badminton, athletics, dance) in order to allow the pupils to learn and progress together. Far from neutral, the choice of activities and their programming is intended both to create dynamic dyads and to encourage a change of “leader” in order to go beyond a tutoring that is too often unidirectional, where “boys help girls.”

As for dance, it continues to be primarily regarded by pupils, in particular Spanish pupils, as a feminine activity. These results approve other studies (Dowling Naess, 2001, Gorely & al., 2003) which confirm the feminine image given to artistic activities by young pupils. In Spain, a reflection on teacher training in artistic activities is being considered (Villar Lopez, 2011). This training seems necessary to “democratize dance” (Padilla & Zurdo, 2003). Allowing students to engage in a genuine artistic experience, such as making a show at the end of the year (Bréau, 2013; Crance, Trohel & Saury, 2014), is an option to combat gender stereotypes. Other proposals suggest that students, especially boys, put words on their feelings and emotions during dance lessons (Gard, 2008). Artistic activities must today be part of the educational offering proposed to the pupils, an offering too often limited to performance activities, considered as masculine. (Lopez-Villar, 2011; Pontais, 2013).

Toys are also subject to gender separation between male (toy cars) and female (dolls). The attitude of the Swiss and Spanish pupils towards toys again reinforces gender norms already present in society (Zegai, 2010). For boys, it seems impossible or at least difficult to play with dolls. These results echo in particular the work carried out on the lack of freedom left to boys and the eagerness of parents to see their children play with toys more consistent with their gender (Collet, 2011). Incidentally, in Spain, 27.2 % of parents still believe that children should play with gender-relevant toys (Lopez-Villar, 2014). To enable each pupil, girls and boys alike, to grow into free and happy adults comfortable with their own identity, it seems essential that they are offered a maximum range of toys. Awareness-raising among parents and work within schools play an important role in the process of deconstructing gender norms and gender

stereotypes. Allowing the pupils to express themselves with a maximum range of toys is particularly important given that the gender identity of the pupils is also built through these manipulations and experiences (Rouyer, 2007).

While our study looked at the views of pupils about gender stereotypes in the course of different activities, future research on the construction of gender identity could be carried out to understand how pupils act and interact in the course of different activities that are more or less stereotyped. The work conducted today around “doing gender” highlights in particular the richness and relevance of observation measures (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Moreover, through the continuation of the PEERS project, new courses of action, used in class or in PE class, could be implemented in order to combat gender stereotypes (e.g., Bréau, Ribalta-Alcalde & Lentillon-Kaestner, 2016; Muller & Olgıati, 2016).

## 8. Conclusion

This study stressed the adherence to gender stereotypes by young pupils educated in Switzerland and Spain. In both countries, sports and toys are the subject of a real division and a gender separation. The comments made by the pupils confirm the broader presence of a divided and gendered society (Butler, 2004). The maintenance of gender stereotypes nevertheless limits the personal and professional success of the young adults of tomorrow, and their freedom to participate in all activities. Reflection and work around the “deconstruction” of gender norms seems necessary (Cuddy, Fiske & Glick, 2008). At school, enabling teachers to think about the gender issue seems important, as the report published by the European Commission (2009) emphasizes that teachers and trainers can sometimes adopt a conservative attitude. In Switzerland, the training offered to future teachers should enable access to a “gender competence” (Liebig, Rosenkranz-Fakkegger & Meyerhofer, 2009), which promotes awareness of gender inequalities



and certain discourses and other stereotyped attitudes. At the University of Teacher Education of State of Vaud, a new office, which opened in April 2014 for the promotion of equality between women and men, would like to participate in the establishment of lessons that combat gender stereotypes and encourage the construction of plural and authentic identities among young pupils. The office for equality between women and men provides HEP Vaud teachers and students with teaching aids to discuss with students the question of equality between the sexes. In Spain, the issue of teacher training is also a priority for the development of a more egalitarian, equitable, and just society (Belalcazar, 2011). Schools and teachers should participate in this work which must at all cost be conducted with primary level pupils as “children do not internalize the world of their significant others as a possible world among many others. They internalize it as the world, the only existing and conceivable world, just the world” (Berger & Luckmann, 2006, p. 184).

## Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to all the students for their participation, dynamism and seriousness within the PEERS project. Thanks to them, this collective adventure could be very rich.