

**Presentation given by Edith Furon and Patric Turner  
20<sup>th</sup> September 2008 - EPINOISI project**

**Abstract**

Poisson Rouge is a digital interactive playground for small children, available freely through the World Wide Web. The project started in 1999 and is ongoing. It is the result of a collaboration between a graphic artist, theater and music performer and a linguist and human computer interaction / usability specialist. It started as an experiment, a creative outlay and a portfolio - in no particular order.

Nearly ten years on, the site has 40000 daily visits, from all around the World, and is used by children at home and in the classroom. The age range is 0-7 mostly, but the site also appeals to adults and older children. It is also a resource used by children with special needs and learning disabilities, in particular autism.

While observing small children playing with real toys, the developers have adhered to existing views on child development and learning theories and practices. The first one relates directly to what Piaget identified as the two first stages of development : the sensorimotor and the preoperational, which are catered for in the sense that children are able to interact with an environment that has special relationships to the real World and thus are provided with concrete situations, from which to draw mental models that will in turn lay the ground for later abstraction. This highly hands-on, yet undirected, autonomous approach also echoes Montessorian views on education.

The setting is a familiar one : a child's bedroom, full of toys. Each toy is clickable and can be played with. There are cubes with numbers, alphabets on the wall, puzzles, a piano, etc. So the children can play music, be introduced to numbers and words in their own language or in others. No prior knowledge is necessary and in fact, it is a great tool for basic ICT skills.

Just as toys rarely come with instructions, there are no instructions as to how to use anything on the site. Functionalities are either easy to find or non-essential. Through exploring the site, children find them and this discovery process is interesting in at least two ways. Firstly, they are proud of their achievements and their findings and while this enduces self-confidence, it also elicits language as they want to share their discoveries with adults and other children Secondly, the very fact that there are things to discover teaches that through exploring, one might learn more things. This is the kind of thought processes that the developers hope will also be carried into the real World.

The Poisson Rouge workshop is still in activity and many projects are under way...

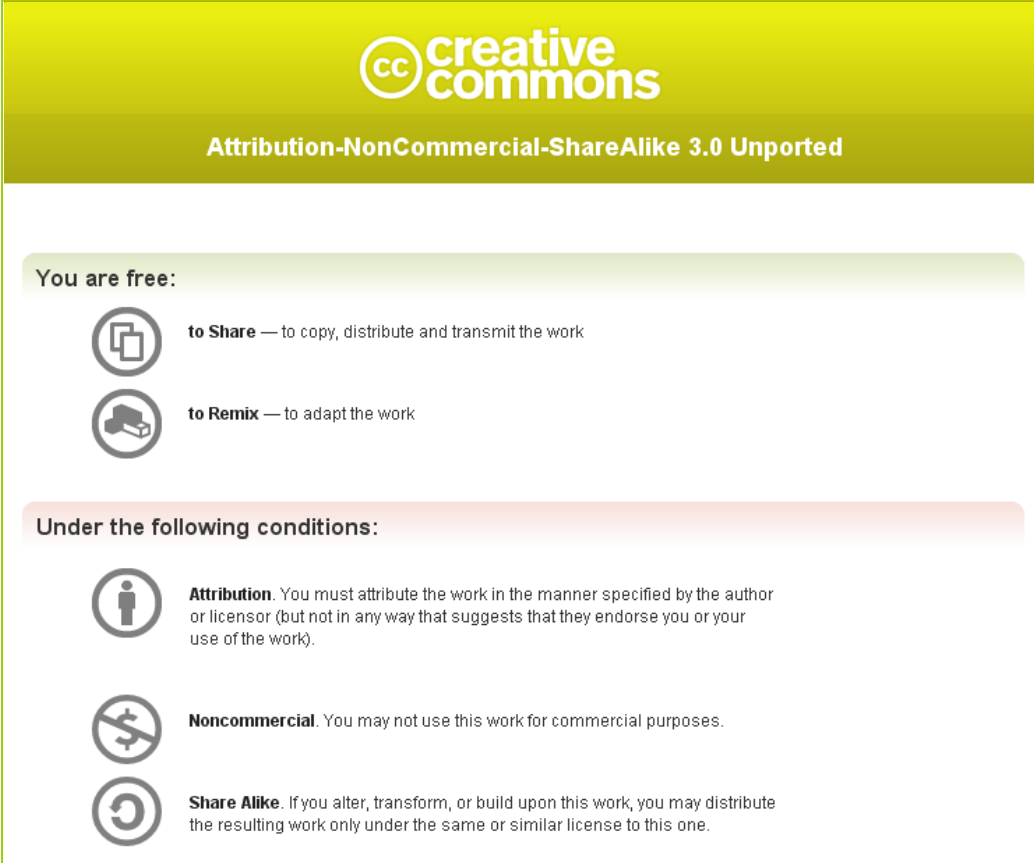
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