

LISTENING TO CHILDREN ON NATURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF A CHILD LISTENING RESEARCH PROJECT CONDUCTED BY ANA CLÁUDIA LEITE AND GANDHY PIORSKI IN THE CITIES OF SÃO PAULO (SP), PORTO ALEGRE (RS), BRASÍLIA (DF), RECIFE (PE) AND BOA VISTA (RO) FROM 2018 TO 2020.



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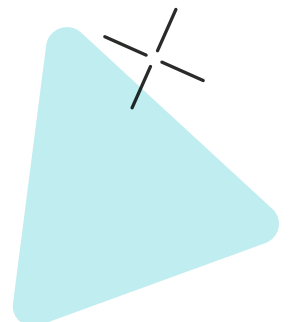
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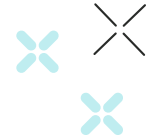
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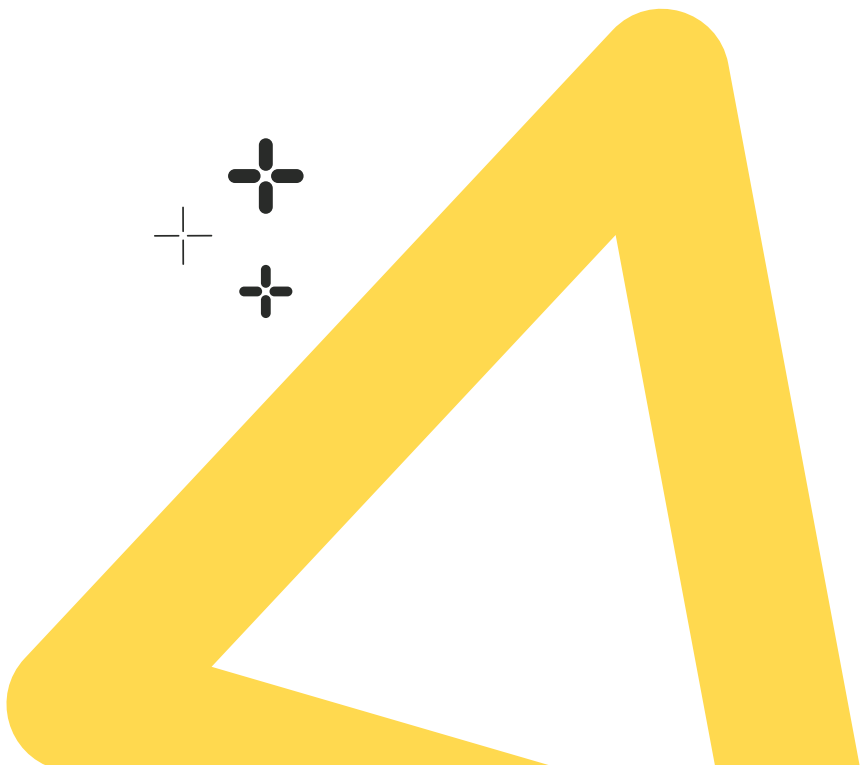
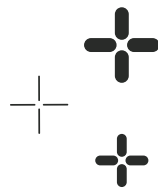
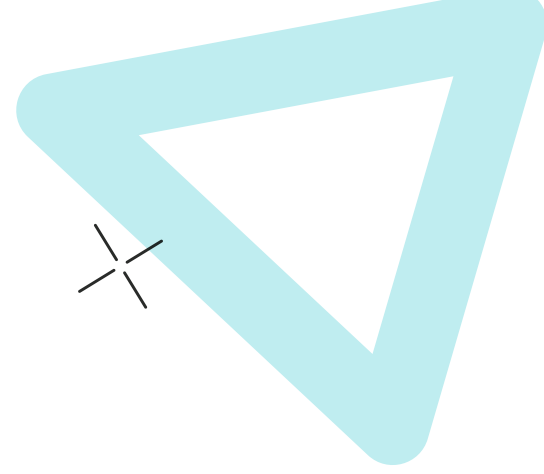


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1. Presentation

This work is the result of a research project on child listening carried out between 2018 and 2020 by Ana Cláudia de Arruda Leite and Gandhi Piorski, with the support of Instituto Alana¹ and the Bernard Van Leer Foundation². The starting point for this work was the interest shown by Instituto Alana in understanding and including the perspectives of children on the impact of climate change on their lives and those of future generations. Subsequently, the Bernard van Leer Foundation learned of the project and saw it as an opportunity to listen to what children had to say about their own city, especially their relationship with outdoor play and mobility, in the municipalities where the Urban 95 Program is active³.

Guided by Article 227 of the Federal Constitution (which determines that the rights and best interests of children and adolescents must be given absolute priority) and the premise that children are subjects of rights and producers of culture, the project developed listening workshops so we could hear from children on complex topics in ways that respect their peculiar stage of development and their different languages and perspectives.

It was carried out in five cities, one in each of Brazil's major geographic regions: Porto Alegre (South Region), São Paulo (Southeast Region), Brasília (Midwest Region), Recife (Northeast Region) and

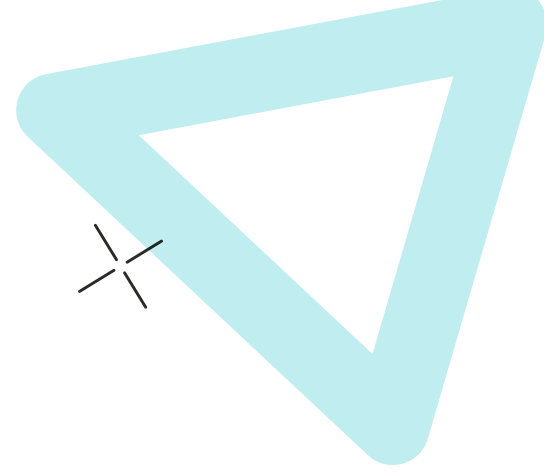
Boa Vista (North Region). Local partners were sought in each municipality to find appropriate venues to hold the listening workshops and to put together heterogeneous groups of children aged 4 to 12. The criteria for composition of the groups sought to ensure they were diverse in terms of age, gender and socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial background and that they included children with physical or intellectual disabilities. Each group was heterogeneous not only in terms of the profile of the children themselves, but also the institutions they came from – referrals came from public and private schools, third sector organizations, cultural spaces and institutions focused on inclusive education.

The listening process was carried out through workshops focusing on multiple languages of expression, developed in two formats: immersive, on four consecutive days with three-hour sessions (totaling 12 hours); and in-depth, with two cycles of four three-hour meetings each spaced by a week (totaling 24 hours). An institutional partner was secured in each municipality to secure a venue, supply the infrastructure for the workshops and welcome accompanying adults.

The listening activities were carried out using a custom methodology, developed exclusively for this project, whose core goal was to create conditions for sensitive and ethical listening to childhoods. The methodology has been documented, and those interested in understanding its concepts more in-depth can read *“For a child-centric method for sensitive listening”*⁴. It proposes a listening process structured around six dimensions: 1) Mapping the group of children; 2) Friendly space; 3) Pedagogical ambience; 4) Quality activities and materials; 5) Recording and organizing of children’s productions; 6) Reading and interpretation of the listening process.

The workshops yielded a vast collection of works, including physical pieces produced by the children with different materials, audio recordings, photos, video footage and field logs, as well as a technical report with an interpretive analysis of the topics covered in the research project.

This executive summary focuses on children's productions and narratives that converse with environmental issues such as climate change and pollution. It aims to give voice to children's perspectives and promote advocacy and social action that includes children in the processes and issues that concern them, ensuring their right to participate and be honored first and foremost.



2. Sensitive listening to children on complex topics

In Brazil, Article 227 of the Federal Constitution states that the rights and best interests of children and adolescents have absolute priority, and as such must be respected and put into effect before all others. The Child and Adolescent Statute, one of the core instruments created to ensure this absolute priority is respected in practice, recognizes the peculiar stage of development characteristic of childhood and adolescence and provides the rationale for the special and integral protection they must receive.

The peculiar status of children and adolescents as persons in development demands respect and care for the particularities of their stage of life – without, however, denying children the right to participate. As well evidenced by Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the right to participation becomes effective as the specificities of childhood, including in relation to age and cognitive and emotional conditions, are ensured. Children can and should be considered even when discussing high-complexity topics such as climate change – one of the topics of the listening processes carried out in this research project –, because these are topics that directly concern them, impacting their lives and those of future generations. The protection and preservation of an ecologically balanced environment,

essential for healthy quality of life for children, is a fundamental right provided for in Article 225 of the Federal Constitution. As is now well known, the role of children and youth has become increasingly prominent for the climate agenda in the world. Children and youth have mobilized to impact the resolution of climate disputes, driving increased coverage of the issue in the media and demanding incisive action by political leaders and local governments.

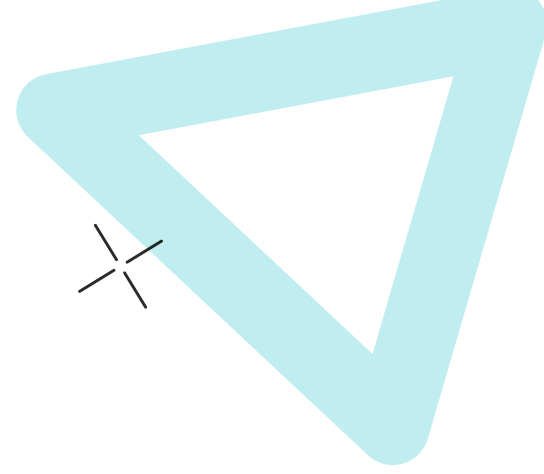
The drive to listen to and include the voices of children must necessarily be conditioned by the commitment to honor childhood, protecting their rights and best interests and safeguarding them from processes that emulate, constrain or even reproduce situations of suffering. This is especially true for complex, multivariate issues that involve different (social, economic, political, environmental) aspects of life. One must be careful to avoid, in the name of the right to participation, carrying out initiatives based on conceptions, narratives and activities that are typical of the adult world but inadequate to children's peculiar stage of development, thus harming not only the children involved, but the overall understanding and advocacy of these issues.

Children need to be considered not only because they are subjects of rights, but because humanity can only gain by listening to its new generations. Childhood has a unique perspective and contribution to offer to challenges, both individually and at the collective level. Imagination and syncretic thinking can bring other possibilities for relationships and the understanding of life. Thus, considering what children have to say on topics that are complex or that pertain to them requires a process of continuous sensitive listening, one that acknowledges and achieves more successfully their place of speech, their languages and peculiarities of expression and their very existence. We add that, for the purposes of this research project, 'complex' themes also include those that concern the vital relationships

that human beings create, sustain and improve in their relationship with the world.

We consider that listening to children on complex themes cannot constrain, limit or modulate their expressions and languages. It is also important to be careful not to expose them to subjects, contents and languages that are not relevant to them and consistent with their emotional and cognitive condition, thus precociously introducing them to different understandings or contexts.

The way in which children express themselves on complex topics is also key to this listening approach. Because the listening conducted here is willing to perceive others in their uniqueness. Thus, when children talk about complex topics, they inexorably activate the resources of their imaginary world. The adult conceptual world does not have enough plasticity to accommodate the feelings endowed with great animus, psychic energy and spiritual (existential) energy that erupt from these themes in children's lives. In childhood, these themes move unconsciously. This means they are only expressed symbolically. Thus, we resort to broader themes that converse with childhood, such as nature, instead of directly addressing climate change. We also employed imaginary plasticity to ease the children into their places of speech and languages.



3. Nature and climate change: the importance of materializing questions in children's daily lives

Two core themes were investigated in the listening workshops held in the five regions of Brazil. The first was climate change, and the second was the relationship between children and the city, especially with outdoor play and mobility.

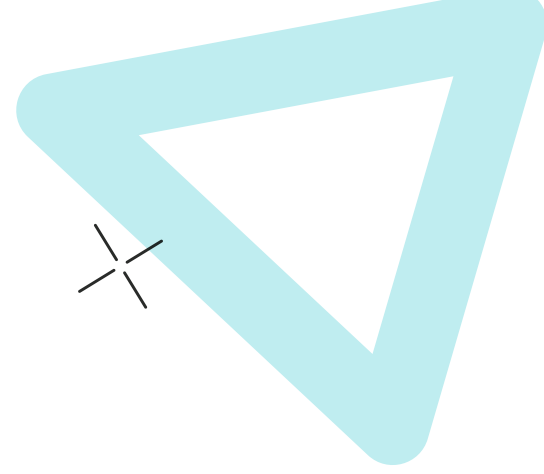
The researchers committed to avoid clichés and ready-made answers, i.e., the ones that would necessarily arise if the usual children's assemblies and forums were held to discuss social, natural and urban issues. By bringing children into a pragmatic flow of thought, nudging them to speak based on problems created and defined by adults, one runs the risk of 'pulling' them from their magical-reflexive paths and onto roads paved with prior data.

Thus, we decided not to bring up themes based on concepts and definitions with a very specific approach. Establishing an underlying theme is conducive and inductive to specific responses, masking perceptions and imposing results. What children understand about climate change, most of the time, comes from environmental education at school or from information published in the media. Fragmented information, news, grown-ups talking.

However, behind the concept of “climate change” lies nature. A powerful image that awakens many possibilities in the idyllic idearium of children. The use of illustrations of collective sentiment makes it easier to concretely see the purpose of the children’s responses, their background feelings, their fears about what threatens their existence. Their impressions of extreme weather events, migratory movements, great floods, scarcity and severe droughts can be captured within the greater theme of nature.

Nature is something affective and intimate, abounding with interests, fears, curiosity, speculations, hypotheses. It is very close and very far; it is very small and very big; it is diverse and unique. It truly is a creative image for the child, one that arouses their investigative curiosity.

Thus, in our listening workshops, we sought to unearth the fundamental elements that underpin the lives of children, the formation of their principles, their collective values and their sense of individuality by approaching these issues related to the continuity of life on Earth (nature) and their social and community relationships (cities).



4. On the interpretative proposition and the exercise of sorting production

Cataloging and organizing children's productions and the image, audio, video and text records produced during the project is an indispensable step for the subsequent step - documentation and analysis of the listening process. Depending on the number of activities, the group and the duration of the workshop, one may end up with an extensive collection that requires due organization before, during and after activities. Identifying all productions and digitizing the collection facilitates the reading of the material, as well as its use in documents and other media. Transcribing children's oral narratives also expands the possibilities for accessing more in-depth characteristics of the words spoken and the tones of expression, which can bring important clues to the later stages of interpretation and analysis.

An interpretive exercise comprises several levels of depth that can reach complex symbolic connections, associating the imaginary of cultures with patterns of personality and using parallelisms and comparative mythologies, among other resources. It was not the purpose of this research project to reach these layers of analysis, but rather to work with clearly identifiable elements in the children's productions

that do not require technical knowledge of psychoanalysis or studies of the unconscious, or even of mythological and symbolic culture.

The interpretative notes are meant to bring attention to a different way of reading materials, one that requires an effort to synthesize narratives and search for themes that emerge from the children's productions themselves. Such themes can even lie in the absences, invisibilities, deficiencies or aspects that could be manifested, but were not.

We worked under the premise that every production based on visual or sound language, i.e., of an aesthetic nature, has central and peripheral points of expression that can be gateways to the essential meaning of what is revealed in the work. To this end, two parameters sustain our proposal for interpretation under this research project, one collaborating with the other. They are:

- 1.** Visual reading of the graphics and shapes presented by the children. The exercise of finding the points with the greatest energy of expression.
- 2.** The child's oral narrative about the work done. This element, when documentation is well organized, is essential for the reading and interpretation of the material. Being able to rely on the child's own words obviates the need for large repertoires or extensive training in reading the codes of the works. One can get to the heart of the expression faster.

It is an exercise in perception associated with sincere respect for the material, which is seen as a lively, legible, believable language, pulsing with meanings and filled with themes closely related to childhood sociology, the study of bodies in contemporary times, notions of temporality, sense of community, work, technology, and the future of life on Earth.

Thus, we opted to discuss the main issues emerging from the activities and demonstrate how these themes were identified with examples of drawings, objects, clay sculptures, stories created and the descriptions of the works.

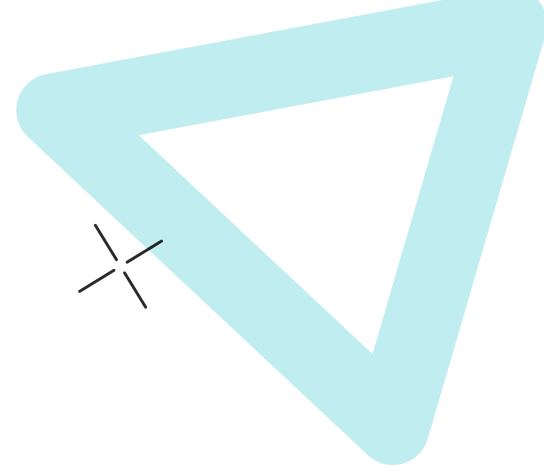
We identified four main areas of exploration under the major theme of nature and climate change. The first, “Web of Life”, brings together a series of children’s productions merging under a systemic narrative. These are productions that express a relationship of interdependence of events, of connectivity between the narrated factors and the feelings contained therein, of the causes and consequences of a set of actions, or even the close relationship between the elements of landscapes, which we then grouped around of the web concept. We considered these to be ‘gut feelings’ of the children, born of our provocations.

The second grouping was that of children’s productions with a constant presence of ideas related to a radical return to the primitive stages of civilization. Collective sleep, mass destruction, the compromising of energy sources, salvation arks, ‘resets’ after catastrophes; these and many other ‘new beginning’ narratives were organized around the theme “Return to the Primitive”.

Another issue that continually arose among the children was the idea that threats or transformations, changes for better or worse, would not come from human beings or natural beings on Earth, but from the planet itself and its geological reorganization, or even from outside of it, i.e., the solar system and the cosmos. These productions were grouped around a third theme, which we named “Geological Drama”.

Finally, the fourth overarching theme of productions was of pieces assigning direct responsibility to human beings for the negative and positive consequences of the social and planetary stage in which they live. This theme, one of the most recurrent in this research project,

continuously pointed us to the children's sensitivity to the notion of alterity and empathy. In different ways, using abundant symbolic projections, they demonstrated how our actions, as people, towards our fellow human beings and other beings in the natural world, have become frail, compromised and frayed. These compositions were gathered under the theme of "Ethical Drama".



5. Children's narratives and productions on nature and climate change

We present below a few examples of productions grouped into the four thematic areas for this research project outlined above, produced by the children participating in the child listening project conducted by Ana Cláudia and Gandhy.

✕ 5.1. Web of life

A seven-year-old boy from São Paulo made the following drawing (Figure 1): a village, a monster, his two best friends, himself, swords, bows and arrows and an abyss. He is with his friend (right side), with a sword in his hand, both cornered at the edge of the abyss, about to fall. He says: “if they take too many steps, the cliff will break off and they’ll fall”.

The monster is a root that contaminates the other roots and turns them into mutants. He says: “We’re up against an infectious monster, like, if it sticks to something, a root that’s been infected, it becomes a mutant. It managed to infiltrate the roots of the other plants and made them mutate. It kills by taking you by the roots and hanging

you by the roots... I have the sword in my hand fighting the monster that started the infection... and they can also infect anything, like this moon there... It turned into a monster too... It's infecting everything... Like this moon that's also going mutant... A tentacle's coming out of it".



The problem is structural; the contagion is at the base of things, and spreads through everything. "It kills by taking you by the roots," says the boy. We note that the boy's body and his two friends' bodies are all drawn thin. Also, the lines that make up the huts of the villages are thin, almost stick-like. The stars are thin. All these elements are a little similar to the roots at the bottom of the drawing. Just like the cornered characters on the edge of the precipice - very fragile, at the limit.

The mutated roots on the surface of the Earth, conversely, are all robust, like the monster, as are the contaminated moon and the flower.

The flower in the drawing is more robust than the boy and his friends. Whatever hasn't been contaminated yet in the drawing, whatever hasn't mutated, is more fragile, thinner, smaller – including the stars.

Things propagate in a network, reverberate in the whole of life; nothing escapes, because everything is interconnected. There is an imminence that is structural in nature, that shakes the foundation of things. This is a drawing that denotes a degree of tension, of anguish, in a child's perception. His sword is much larger than he is, with darker, more marked features, with heavy angles. A burden; a weight.

Another example, still denoting the idea of a web, comes from an eight-year-old boy from Boa Vista. In the activity, he was asked to draw nature, himself and the four elements (Figure 2). The activity was always intended to evoke elementary thoughts about nature. How children see themselves in or in relation to it. He synthesized his drawing with the title "Life".



He says: “My drawing’s called ‘life’. Nature’s a kind of life. I’m here feeling a free being. There’s wind, the sun, and a ‘little heron’ – I improvised a little – and these fish too. And there’s water too. All of this represents one life and several elements.”

It can be seen that he has his back to the viewer, but is facing the depth of the landscape. He didn’t attach much importance to his self-portrait; he just indulged himself. Throughout the project, there was one more child who portrayed themselves with their back turned, but as a form of protest and denial in the face of a situation. Here, he clearly expands into life; he understands it as a whole, “one life”, albeit with “several elements”.

Air, that element of openness, is predominant in almost all of the paper. On the earth, where the boy is, the most central symbol is also the air, in the form of the “little heron”. He was not content to draw the four elements and himself, as he was asked. In fact, he drew five elements. Integrated with fire, earth, water and the mighty air, there is him. He is another element of nature. The clue to this perception lies in the recurring presence of the number five in the drawing. There are five fish in the water, five birds – four above the clouds and one perched, the “little heron” –, and five lines below the clouds that represent the wind.

There is an idea of a landscape interconnected by the number five. A perception of integration. Life is one, within countless variables. It seems that the child is trying to say, “Even if my body still bears marks of inability, even if my arms feel the weight of expanding (thick and heavy), I expand, I strive to belong to all this, which is nature.”

✕ 5.2 Return to primitive

One of the aspects of this theme of return to the primitive is that of mass destruction or extreme deprivation. To protect themselves from catastrophes, many of the children built shelters, dwelling ships – sort of Noah’s arks –, and represented ways of hunting and surviving after floods, extreme heat and the warming of the Earth. It is important to emphasize that these themes were not provoked in the children. They emerged spontaneously when the theme of “nature” was evoked.

Figure 3 shows a survival and life support tower. The tower was built in a collective activity in the city of São Paulo. The instruction was: *imagine and build what life will be like a hundred years from now*. In four tables, four different groups built their representations. The second direction given was: *create a communication system between your own building and those of the rest of the groups*. The idea of communication was problematized by researchers in different ways. Some open-ended questions were asked, such as: *What will communication be like a hundred years from now? What are the possible forms of communication?*

This tower is the building designed by one of the groups. Three children, two boys and one girl participated. Only two of them narrated. The boy said: “The Eiffel Tower of the future! One antenna connects with several countries. There are booths where we detect wars, who’s being invaded and stuff”. The girl said: “A cosmic antenna that represents all these countries that are here around us”. The boy continues: “A global, universal antenna. This tower has everything our planet needs, like trees, water, houses, fire, better presidents.” The girl then says, “the fire helps light the ovens at home”.



They started calling the tables, with the works from the groups, 'continents'. The boy said about his building, which he called Brazil: "Brazil was, like, better tuned in, more equipped than other countries, on several continents, Europe, Oceania, Africa and America". The girl intervenes and adds: "This is an even worse continent; this is a continent of destruction and intergalactic wars. Because intergalactic wars are destroying this base here, of the continent of nature."

The narrative unfolds down long paths, through to galaxies, to the universe of universes – according to them, there are many –, and then back to what they finally called "Brazil's international base". They conclude with the heroic feeling of accomplishment. The boy said: "So this is the main tower. If it's disconnected from the others, unfortunately it will only protect two continents. The one in Brazil is the strongest of all the towers (...). We're the guardians of the universe (referring to his fellow inventors). One day it was destroyed and we rebuilt it, because our ancestors couldn't protect it".

The tower is a kind of ark. It contains everything. Fire, better presidents, trees. It is a storehouse of possibilities for the perpetuation of life. A concentric, nuclear artifact that harbors the possibilities of survival. A base of creation, from which comes the seed of the future. Major genes are preserved for perpetuation. In a biological mythology, it is the DNA code itself. In a Judeo-Christian religious myth, it is Noah, his children and possible examples for the continuity of life on Earth.

The narrative of a previous, primeval state, born of a cataclysm, of a change of course in life, is clear. A state that remains on guard, in adaptability, surviving a major transition. A return to latency, to the least effort to sustain the possibility of more losses and, even so, of activity, of readiness to help, to guarantee sustenance.

We witness a symbol of adaptability and economy of forces for the perpetuation of life, for the continued existence of nature, in a conflicting moment of transition in which “the ancestors were not able to protect it”, in which the “intergalactic wars are destroying the continent of nature”. This return to the source is a return to the primitive, to the need to restart, to regenerate life. Where the ancestors failed (“one day it was destroyed and we built it again”), those who recovered were the new generations, the children. They took up the responsibility of minimizing damage, of ensuring continuity.

Here the weight falls on the need to decide for others, to rebuild what was abandoned. However, the unique proposition brought forward is to return to a simple metabolism, which consumes little and is prepared to act in emergencies, helping only with what is necessary to maintain life. A thought of return to core, of biomimetics, of return to self, formulates a capsule that is at once a treasure vault, a guard tower and a source of aid. This adaptability function comes – in times of extreme changes in nature – from the most primitive, primeval biological information so that the species continues to live.

In Recife, in another image of return, an eight-year-old boy created a cannon (Figure 4). The following provocation was made during a guided activity: *something is happening on planet Earth, but we don't know what it is. You need to create something that finds out what's going on and brings answers, solutions.*

The boy then created a sleep weapon. War was the problem. He then developed a “cannon that launches a gas bomb and everyone sleeps in peace”. Of the entire collection, this was maybe the most radical symbol used to solve the problems that afflict Earth and humanity – the possibility of falling asleep, of temporary death, of rest and unconsciousness in the hope of a new time. Returning to the generational

source, to the amniotic origin, to uterine sleep, was the solution found by the boy who only saw wars and violence ravaging Earth.



His cannon that launches a sleeping gas bomb is a kind of foreboding of the witch that would put the whole kingdom to sleep when the princess pricks her finger on the spinning wheel. Only in the future, after a long sleep and the arrival of a primordial, princely figure of return to the primordial, would the kingdom come back to life. His cannon has a red tip, where the gas comes out, and points to the return to the pre-conscious, the inception stage, to the first learning, to the reorganization of values and the suspension of disorderly and destructive movement.

He finds an extreme way out. It denotes a feeling, a perception of the complexity and entanglement of relationships, of the loss and

illness of the planet where human beings are the protagonists. Such a mode of degeneration and unbridled action needs to be contained; the best way out is to stop everything abruptly, because, as it is, things are no longer solvable. The tourniquet to stop the bleeding is collective coma, paralyzing sleep. Dialogue, peace treaties, humanisms, agreements between peoples... None of that works. Armistices are no longer reliable.

5.3 Geological drama

For some children, the environmental problems experienced on Earth are not the work of man, but of nature itself. We consider this theme important, as it is in line with a school of scientific thought that deals with colossal geological movements that shape climate, geography, plant and animal life.

For a nine-year-old boy from Boa Vista, something is happening on the planet. To unravel the mystery, he created a “micro-organism weapon” (Figure 5). He says: “It collects the energy and heat from the Sun and turns it into microorganisms. Then it shoots them into space so they help find out what’s happening to planet Earth... and if there are other lives, alien intelligence.” He says: “I found out there’s another planet that’s too close... It’s something with the atmosphere... dangerous... if you get too close you can break the atmosphere.”

This image created by the boy is related to the previously discussed theme of the web of life. It is a structural perspective of an interconnected whole, but here it has the specificity of not attributing this problem to human behavior, but rather to the movement of the planets.



His invention seeks intelligent life beyond Earth. It looks for possibilities of exit, possibilities of contact, of expanding horizons for such a fragile situation, the threat of rupture of the atmosphere by a colossal force of nature.

In São Paulo, a seven-year-old girl made a planet (Figure 6). She says: “I made planet Earth. It’s ending because the sun crashed... the two hit each other, then the planet turned red and that’s it”. Here the same theme is the clash between the Sun and the Earth and the consequent destruction of the planet. In this case, the Earth was totally destroyed. It wasn’t just a danger.



In Boa Vista, a ten-year-old boy made Mount Everest (Figure 7). The drawing demonstrates intense geological movement down there on Earth. The boy drew himself way up there, on the peak of the mountain, above the clouds. Clouds throw rain, hail and lightning.

Under the earth run rivers of snowmelt from the Everest, as well as fire. The theme of restless, volcanic fire appeared in several drawings.



A similar topic can be seen in the drawing of a 12-year-old boy from Porto Alegre, this time with the movement coming from space and hitting the Earth in the form of asteroids (Figure 8). It is heat-intense, with fire once again portrayed as a force of instability. Many drawings with expanding, out-of-control fires, or many suns, indirectly bring up the theme of Earth warming. Like something felt by children. A threat that they sense or recognize, but do not address directly in a discursive way or elaborate on when talking about global warming. However, they portrayed it in quite forceful ways in all the cities.

The children bring up the geological theme as a catastrophic movement of great proportions happening inside the Earth or coming from space. They point to great changes, to another way of life, to a new era that will emerge in humanity, if it survives. A great deal

of drama is present. The apocalyptic feeling that something will be revealed, that things will regenerate after a great destruction, denotes an imaginary of little trust in human action and the hope that nature itself will solve things.



There is a religious element there, transcendent in these images, as it entrusts the conduct of things to a force much greater than man himself. There is also an intuitive knowledge in children that certainly gains momentum – influenced by science fiction, people they interact with, content they listen to and watch, family religions –, that there are epochs, eras of transition where planetary life needs to move along, reorganize.

✕ 5.4 Ethical drama

The ethical theme accounted for a significant part of the collection of works, in contrast with the smaller number of pieces we classified

under the “Geological Drama” category. Here, children attribute much of the problems of nature and cities to human behavior. In relation to nature, to life on Earth, the children’s thinking is in line with what scientists have called the Anthropocene: a geological age in which man is contributing to large-scale changes in life conditions on the planet, with humans replacing nature as the dominant environmental force on Earth. Numerous solutions and projects developed by the children signaled the commitments that, we, as humankind, would need to undertake to minimize the impacts of our actions.

Many productions propose a radical ethic for the preservation of life. Some children created images about the harm caused to life by people’s state of mind, taking into account the threat to the planet coming from man against man himself. A 12-year-old girl from São Paulo created the “joy making factory” (Figure 9). According to the girl, the machine “is for people who are prejudiced against gays, lesbians and any type, any gender”. She explains how her invention works: “First, the person gets smaller in size with a device. Then, they enter an environment that throws paint, glitter, colors. Then the person is flattened until they look like a piece of paper. Then they go into a tube, they go in by teleportation. Then they leave it and go back to their normal size without prejudices... People don’t put themselves in other people’s shoes”.



She claims that this is the problem that's happening on the planet and that her invention can solve the main threat against life. People can put themselves in each other's shoes. A technology of alterity, of empathy. A life-correcting invention. A radical ecological gesture that can reorder all human behavior and create a new civilization. The threat to life is in human consciousness. Still in a state of barbarism, without recognizing its fellow man and nature, it runs the risk of self-destructing and destroying everything around it. A joy factory as an antidote to the anesthesia of feeling.

An invention that is interested in the perception of the other's pain, but also interested in the recognition of the other's potential, of the place they should occupy, of the space that has been destined for them in life. A humanist gesture. A small treatise on humility. Before entering the machine, the person is flattened. Ancient monasteries, especially those of asceticism, had small doors as entrances to the cells. To go through it, one must bend with the knees almost to the ground. To reduce oneself, to make oneself small, to place oneself in a smaller place, so that a more fraternal, egalitarian, unison perception is born.

And the person continues its path through the machine. Then comes the shower of colors and then a press, from which one comes out thin as paper. The idea of the press also arises in several enchanting religious cultures and even in yogic traditions; the beginner's ego is crushed, ground, macerated, flattened throughout their apprenticeship. Only then will they be able to recognize the true nature of things, the depth and meaning of life, the human essence as divine essence, life as the unique matrix for all forms of existence.

Another example is a composition by a five-year-old boy from Brasília called *Pato Joinha* ("Thumbs-up Duck", Figure 10). He says: "I made

a thumbs-up duck that makes people happy... Some people are always sad... Bad things... Keep thinking of bad things... I remember bad things all the time... A sad thing... Then the thumbs-up duck makes people happy”.



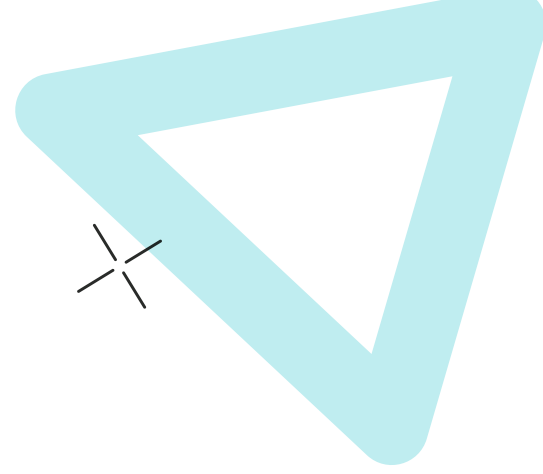
For this boy, the problem with the planet is one of sadness. Many bad things certainly happening in his surroundings brought about the duck. It is a very simple friend, a duck – not one of great heroic feats in the imaginary of animals. A creature even considered a bit clumsy, but funny. Simple and funny. Simple. Perhaps this is the understanding of life for the boy. It is simple, but adults make it complicated, sad, heavy and difficult.

The duck is a symbol in many cultures of initiation, change, transition, even resurrection. The flocks of ducks represent, especially (but not only) in the northern hemisphere, times of change, of great migrations, of a new season.

The idea of a ministry of happiness would perhaps fit in well as a public policy path born from the image of the *Pato Joinha*. It harkens

back to an ethical review of the priorities of governments around the world, such as the Gross National Happiness (GNH) systemic indicator created in Bhutan. Joy as a path to health and the possibility of life for beings. The source for this joy, in the child's soul, is precisely in nature, in the duck. The solution to the problem afflicting the planet (sadness) is not a portentous technological invention; it does not come directly from man, nor from other planetary spheres. It rather comes from the duck - nice, friendly, simple. Again we see the attitude of seeing in the other, however small, the way out of planetary dramas.

Perhaps this duckling is just a child's expression of themselves and their emotional state. And it certainly has aspects of it. But it is also a collective feeling, as it was brought by him as a perception that others also feel sadness for various reasons.



6. Final considerations

Throughout the five cities where the listening workshops were held – Porto Alegre (South Region), São Paulo (Southeast Region), Brasília (Midwest Region), Recife (Northeast Region) and Boa Vista (North Region) –, a common theme arose: the imaginary of the natural and sensorial world of the children was the most representative and present in the productions. Even when these themes were not evoked. Various models, drawings and objects appeal to a deep cry arising from the children's bodies, from their relationship with animals, plants, rivers, mountains, land, adventure in unknown terrains, oceanic navigations.

We can unequivocally state that, when it comes to composing images of nature, children's bodies come to the fore and speak to their most structural anxieties. Therefore, it is more common to see idyllic images of imaginary places than real places with which they coexist. However, when there is an effective interaction with the spaces of nature, narratives are flooded with impressions awakened by contact with these places.

Most images of outdoor play are dreams of an ideal place or a memory of experiences of contact with natural environments, rather than daily life with open spaces, conducive to movement and free play.

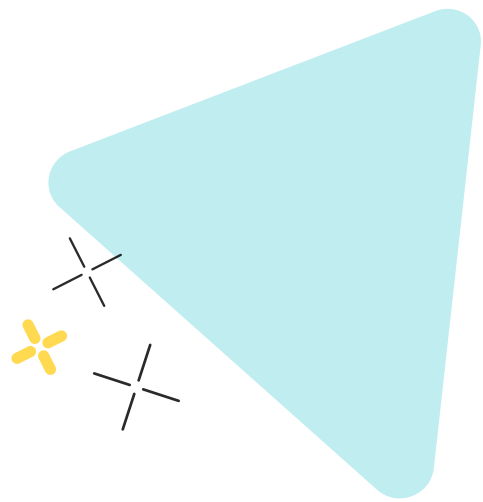
Water is a recurrence in these images of outdoor play spaces. It evokes fluidity, the possibility of giving flow, of washing, of revitalizing. In the drawings of play, both outdoor and in nature, the water element insists on showing itself as the greatest means of expansion for children.

Technology also appears as an evaluative potential. It is a material framework, a tool of many possibilities, enormous agility and incredible adaptability that can easily become a magical support for the generations that were born in this cultural imaginary. Everything can happen. if it still can't happen, soon it will.

Children, in this never-before-seen environment of unstoppable technological dynamism, create strong representations of their magical desires, their saving possibilities, their heroic dreams in this apparatus of sophisticated tools, one capable – in the fictional ideology – of omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience. It is a fertile ground for valuations, for the birth of meanings. As will be seen, the technological solutions conceived by children are born out of an urgent sense of community life that they have been seeing slipping away.

Many agile and efficient tools were created to solve urban problems and large-scale collective dramas. An evident feeling of chaotic coexistence is expressed in the children's designs. Their narratives carry a clear a sense of urgency to solve problems.

On the one hand, nature is perceived as a source of life, of beauty, of integration and development; on the other, it bears the fears of complex and serious environmental problems, already felt by children, that will bring great impacts to present and future generations. Technology and the accumulation of knowledge present themselves as possible allies in facing the problems, but which necessarily depend on a change in values and the ethical commitment of adults to put the sustainability of the planet and the lives of present and future generations first.



Notes

1. The Instituto Alana is a non-profit civil society organization that develops programs and actions focused on ensuring the necessary conditions for the full experience of childhood. Created in 1994, the Instituto Alana has as its mission *to honor the child* and as its core goal to raise awareness of and promote application of Article 227 of the Federal Constitution, which establishes absolute priority is to be given to the rights of children and adolescents, which must be respected and protected first and foremost under shared responsibility between the State, families and society. To learn more, visit <https://alana.org.br/>. [\[return to page\]](#)

2. Established more than 50 years ago, the Bernard Van Leer Foundation is a private entity whose core goal is to develop and share knowledge of experiences that work in early childhood development. It provides financial support and expertise to governments, civil society and private partners to help test and scale up services that effectively improve the lives of young children and their families. To learn more, visit <https://bernardvanleer.org/pt-br/>. [\[return to page\]](#)

3. The Urban 95 initiative was created to promote the interests of babies, young children and caregivers who rarely have a voice in urban planning, mobility strategies and programs and services for them. It seeks to answer one core question: If you could experience a city at about 95 cm height (approximately 3", the average height of a 3-year-old) –, what would you change? To learn more, visit <https://bernardvanleer.org/pt-br/solutions/urban95-pt/>. [\[return to page\]](#)

4. Executive Summary of a child listening research project conducted by Ana Cláudia Leite and Gandhi Piorski in the cities of São Paulo (SP), Porto Alegre (RS), Brasília (DF), Recife (PE) and Boa Vista (RO) from 2018 to 2020. [\[return to page\]](#)

Annexes

Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

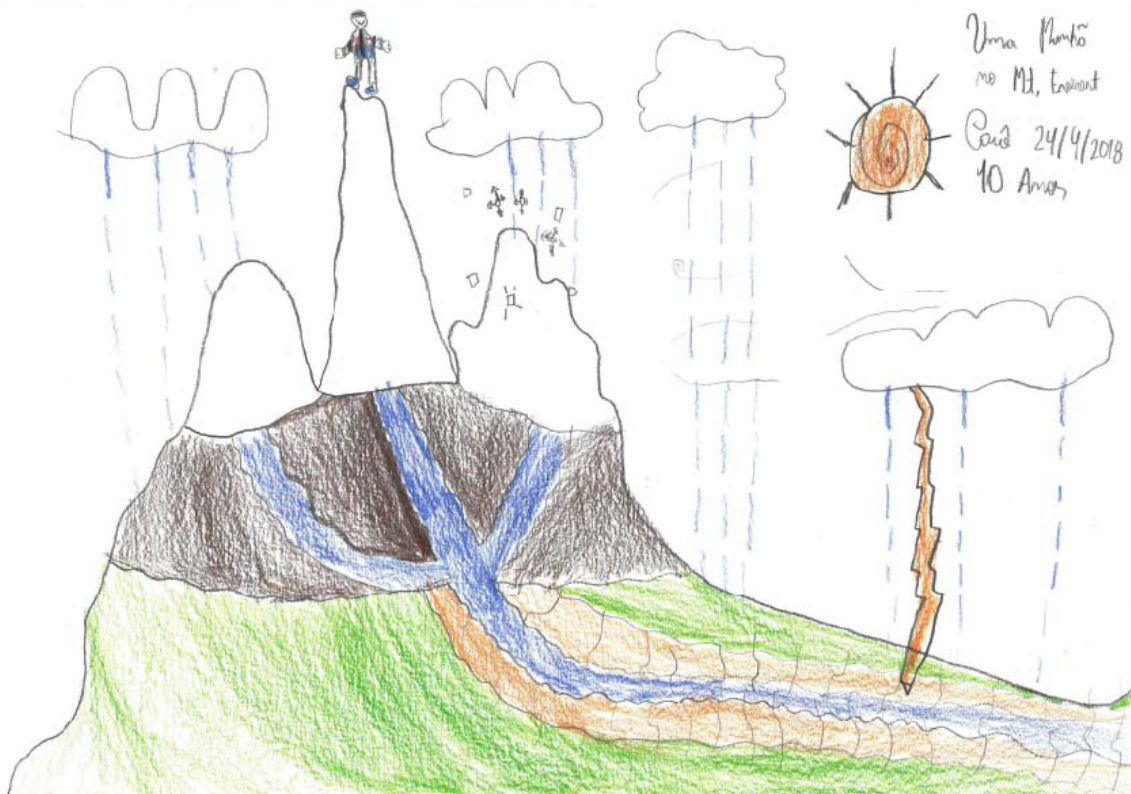


Figura 8

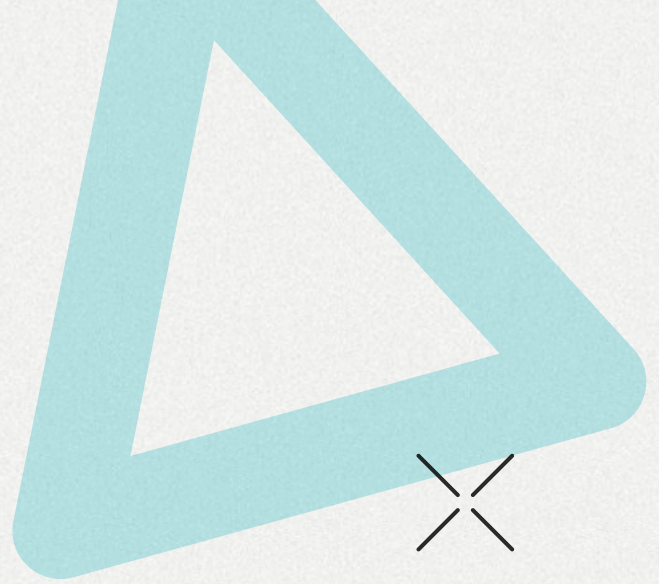


Figure 9



Figure 10





LISTENING TO CHILDREN ON NATURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF A CHILD LISTENING RESEARCH PROJECT CONDUCTED BY ANA CLÁUDIA LEITE AND GANDHY PIORSKI IN THE CITIES OF SÃO PAULO (SP), PORTO ALEGRE (RS), BRASÍLIA (DF), RECIFE (PE) AND BOA VISTA (RO) FROM 2018 TO 2020.



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