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**My Grandparents and I:  
Intergenerational relations between grandparents and grandchildren  
from the point of view of the children**



Inaugural Dissertation  
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Submitted by  
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from  
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This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved *Granny Catarina*,  
for the many happy childhood memories from the times I spent with  
her.

Of my memories as a grand-daughter, I have a special fondness for  
the times we used to go to the cowshed together to milk the cows  
and come back carrying two buckets brimming with fresh milk;

In my memories as a grand-daughter, there are some canticles and  
verses in Italian, that you taught me; the games we played under the  
cinnamon tree, around the reservoir, in the tamed countryside, when  
the cows came home at sunset; there is the smell of cake coming out  
of the oven, the taste of delicious home-made food, the color a  
duck's egg and fresh salami omelet and the smell of free-range  
chicken risotto;

In my memories as a grand-daughter, there are your hands, granny,  
molding the fresh cheese and vigorously stirring the golden-yellow  
polenta mixture, as I sat at the already dying embers and fed the  
stove another piece of firewood...

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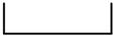
# List of Symbols

 Individual of indeterminate sex

 Female individual

 Male individual

 Deceased individual

 Marriage

 Issue

 Divorce

 Second marriage



*“Le cose dei bambini e per i bambini si apprendono solo dai bambini”*

*Loris Malaguzzi (1995, p.51)*

## Abstract

This dissertation examines intergenerational relationships between grandparents and grandchildren from the child's point of view. In an effort to understand these relationships better, 36 boys and girls aged between seven and ten years were interviewed in the course of six meetings, which took place during school hours. The children interviewed came from middle and upper middle class families in the city of Porto Alegre (in the Brazilian State of Rio Grande do Sul) and belong to four different family types: nuclear, single parent, reconstituted and three-generation. This enabled intergenerational relationships to be studied in different circumstances. In this thesis, children talk about how they live in their families and about how contact with grandparents is established within the family structures under analysis. The children's biographies show the effect of divorce and remarriage on intergenerational relationships, the importance of ties established by the middle generation and a strong propensity to establish and maintain contact with the maternal family line. In their experience as grandchildren, boys and girls report moments of care, discovery, adventure and play, and their grandparents' home appears in its full relevance and uniqueness. This is an important place in the child's world, and the children show, through their knowledge, that living with grandparents contributes to the constitution of the childhood *self*. Intergenerational contact is revealed to be an interactive and co-educational process, which provides old and young alike with opportunities to learn and teach. Children's ties to their grandparents may be so strong that not even the latter's death can break them.

*Keywords:* intergenerational relationships, sociology of childhood, grandparents, grandchildren, contemporary families.

# Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Dissertation untersucht die intergenerationellen Beziehungen zwischen Großeltern und Enkelkindern aus der Perspektive des Kindes. Um diese Beziehung besser verstehen zu können, wurden 36 Jungen und Mädchen im Alter zwischen sieben und zehn Jahren im Verlauf von sechs Untersuchungseinheiten, die während der Schulstunden stattfanden, interviewt. Die befragten Kinder kommen aus mittleren und oberen Mittelschichtfamilien in der Stadt Porto Alegre (im brasilianischen Bundesstaat Rio Grande do Sul) und gehören vier unterschiedlichen Familienformen an: Kernfamilien, Ein-Eltern-Familien, rekonstruierte Familien und Drei-Generationen-Familien. Auf diese Weise konnten die intergenerationellen Beziehungen in unterschiedlichen Lebenszusammenhängen untersucht werden. In dieser Arbeit sprechen Kinder darüber, wie sie in ihren Familien leben und wie sich der Kontakt mit den Großeltern unter der jeweiligen Bedingung der hier berücksichtigten unterschiedlichen Familienformen gestaltet. In den Biografien der Kinder lassen sich sowohl die Auswirkungen von Scheidung und Wiederverheiratung auf die intergenerationellen Beziehungen nachweisen als auch die Bedeutung der durch die mittlere Generation geschaffenen Bindungen sowie die Tendenz zur Intensivierung der Kontakte innerhalb der mütterlichen Familienlinie. In ihrer Rolle als Enkelkinder berichten die Jungen und Mädchen von der Erfahrung von Fürsorge, von Momenten der Entdeckung, von Abenteuer und Spiel, so dass das Haus bzw. die Wohnung der Großeltern sich als hoch bedeutsam und einzigartig für sie erweist. Es ist ein wichtiger Platz in der Lebenswelt des Kindes und die Kinder machen durch ihr Wissen darüber deutlich, dass das Leben mit Großeltern ganz wesentlich zur Konstituierung eines Kindheits-Selbst beiträgt. Der intergenerationelle Kontakt erweist sich als ein interaktiver und wechselseitiger Ko-Entwicklungsprozess, der Jungen und Alten in gleicher Weise die Gelegenheit gibt, zu lernen und zu lehren. Die kindlichen Bindungen an die Großeltern können so stark sein, dass selbst der Tod der Großeltern diese nicht abbrechen.

**Schlagnorte:** intergenerationelle Beziehungen, Soziologie der Kindheit, Großeltern, Enkelkinder, gegenwärtige Familien.

## Resumo

Esta pesquisa trata das relações intergeracionais entre avós e netos a partir da perspectiva das crianças. Com o objetivo de conhecer melhor essas relações, 36 meninos e meninas, com idades entre sete e dez anos, foram entrevistados ao longo de seis encontros ocorridos durante o período escolar. As crianças, pertencentes à classe média e média alta da cidade de Porto Alegre (RS), fazem parte de quatro grupos familiares diversificados: vivem em famílias nucleares, monoparentais, reconstituídas e conviventes com avós, o que possibilitou olhar para essas relações a partir de diferentes lugares. Nesta pesquisa, as crianças falam sobre o modo como elas vivem nessas diferentes famílias e sobre como o contato com os avós se estabelece dentro desses diferentes contextos. Em suas biografias, podemos observar o atravessamento do divórcio e dos recasamentos nas relações intergeracionais, a importância dos elos estabelecidos pela geração do meio e uma forte inclinação ao contato com a linha materna. Na experiência de ser neto, meninos e meninas narram momentos de cuidado, de descobertas, de aventura e de brincadeira, nos quais a casa dos avós aparece com toda a sua relevância e singularidade. Esse é um importante espaço de trânsito do universo das crianças, e elas nos mostram, por meio de seus saberes, que o convívio com os avós contribui para a própria constituição do *eu* infantil. O contato intergeracional surge como um processo interativo e co-educativo, onde tanto os mais velhos, quanto os mais novos, têm a chance de aprender e ensinar. Para as crianças, os vínculos que os unem podem ser tão fortes que nem a finitude dos avós é capaz de desfazer esses laços.

**Palavras-chave:** relações intergeracionais, sociologia da infância, avós, netos, famílias contemporâneas.

## Résumé

Cette recherche traite des relations intergénérationnelles entre grands-parents et petits-enfants du point de vue des enfants. Afin de mieux comprendre ces relations, six rencontres ont été réalisées auprès de 36 garçons et filles, âgés de sept à dix ans, pendant leur période scolaire. Les enfants appartiennent à la classe moyenne de la ville de Porto Alegre (RS) et font partie de quatre groupes familiaux diversifiés : ils vivent dans des familles biparentales, monoparentales, reconstituées ou tri-générationnelles, ce qui a permis d'observer ces relations selon différents points de vue. Dans cette recherche, les enfants parlent de leur mode de vie dans ces différents contextes familiaux et de la manière dont s'établit le contact avec leurs grands-parents. Au travers de leurs biographies, nous pouvons observer l'interférence des divorces et des remariages dans les relations intergénérationnelles, l'importance du chaînon établi par la génération intermédiaire et la forte propension au contact avec la lignée maternelle. Dans leur expérience de petits-enfants, ces garçons et ces filles racontent des moments d'attention, de découvertes, d'aventures et de jeu, dans lesquels la maison des grands-parents apparaît dans toute son importance et sa singularité. Il s'agit d'un important lieu de passage dans l'univers des enfants et ceux-ci nous montrent, à travers leurs connaissances, que la relation avec les grands-parents contribue à la propre constitution du je de l'enfant. Le contact intergénérationnel apparaît comme un processus interactif et co-éducatif où tant les plus âgés que les plus jeunes ont la chance d'apprendre et d'enseigner. Pour les enfants, les liens qui les unissent peuvent être tellement forts que même la finitude des grands-parents n'est pas capable de briser ces liens.

*Mots clés:* relations intergénérationnelles, sociologie de l'enfance, grands-parents, petits-enfants, familles contemporaines.

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## Introduction

The illustration on the cover of this thesis is a reproduction of a painting by the Mexican artist, Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), produced in 1936. *My grandparents, my parents and I* retraces the origins of the artist and is a tribute to her own family tree. At a time when Hitler had just proclaimed the Nuremberg Laws – *die Nürnberger Gesetze* –, prohibiting marriage between Germans and Jews, and when Aryan purity was being assessed by means of genealogy, Kahlo resolved to subvert this. Her painting takes the form of a family tree precisely to show off her multiracial heritage. Inspired by Henri Rousseau's *The Present and the Past*, the artist shows a symmetrical family grouping, based on the marriage bonds, which shows the changes the family has undergone over time in the superimposition and coexistence of generations.

If we look at the image carefully, we can see, on the right, her paternal grandparents, who lived in *Baden Baden*, Germany. They appear here over a representation of the sea, thereby suggesting distance and the waters of the Atlantic Ocean that separates the American continent (where her mother lived and where she herself was born) from Europe, where her father lived before he moved to Mexico. On the left, are her maternal grandparents, of Mexican origin, depicted over the land. She shows mountains, the cacti and dry climate typical of the country. Her parents appear in the middle, in a pose taken from a photograph of their wedding day. From the mother, a fetus is emerging attached by the umbilical cord, which nourishes and gives life. This baby is Frida herself, grown up and transformed into the child that is around the walls of the Blue House. This house is, in the artist's childhood memoirs, the setting for important family stories, which it envelops in its grand windows and gardens. This was where Frida lived most of her life and where she would die, in July 1954. In her right hand, the child Frida also holds a red thread, showing that she is internally linked to the older generations; that she is the bond that joins the mother's and father's sides of the family together: "A ribbon circles all the group, symbolic of the family relation", as the artist herself explains (Kahlo, 1939, [n.p.]).

The sense of continuity that Kahlo evokes, the links with older generations, the parents placed in a position that connects the child to her grandparents and importance of the home as a place of remembrance – a place that also protects and shelters the child within its walls – are points of contact between the work of art and this thesis. Kahlo has



depicted herself as a child – “Me in the middle of this house, when I was about two years old. The whole house is in perspective as I remember it” (Kahlo, 1939, [n.p.]) –, summoning up, in adult life, the memories that do not let her past die. In the act of remembering, Kahlo does not revive her life as a child; it is an exercise in “recreating, reconstituting, rethinking the experiences of the past, in the images and ideas of today” (Bosi, 1994, p. 55). These experiences of times gone by, as Kahlo encourages us to reflect, often concern the family and the ties we had with our parents and grandparents. However, it is almost always a faded picture, a photograph that has fragmented into irregular pieces that we try to put back together in our memory.

Throughout this thesis, therefore, I defend the idea that seeing childhood through the eyes of an adult is different from seeing it through the eyes of a child. While the testimony of adults constitute reports *on childhood*, in which they search in the depths of their memories to recover the toys and games and the memories of school life and the events that marked the early years of their lives; children produce reports *of childhood*, speaking of their immediate experiences (Christensen & James, 2008). In the case of the former, childhood takes on a different meaning in the memories of someone who is no longer a child, but recalls what they have lived through in the past. In the latter, the children are the contemporary authors of their own biographies and transmit the experiences of being a child through the meanings that they themselves give them as subjects belonging to this generational category. The perspective also changes. Thus, Keck and Saraceno (2008) remark that studying intergenerational relationships on the basis of the testimony of parents and grandchildren is not the same as studying them on the basis of the testimony of the grandchildren themselves:

Taking the perspective of grandchildren opens up a range of activities, as well as of hierarchies of importance, which are different from those prevalent when the focus is on the grandparents’, or the parents’ perspective. A grandparent or a parent may say that the former “provides care” whereas a child might point out that a grandfather tells stories or that a grandmother teaches her songs or bakes cakes with him (p.157-158).

But it took a long time for the relations between grandparents and grandchildren to find its place in academic research. Attias-Donfut and Segalen (1998; 2001) remind us that grandparents were the great forgotten figures of sociology: the image of grandparenthood strongly associated with old age and the social and economic hardships of the elderly – who



for a long time constituted a minority group – led scholars to undervalue this subject and consider it unworthy of academic work. According to the historical survey conducted by Szinovacz (1998), in North America, the study of intergenerational relations first began in the late 1940s and early 1950s, with the end of the Second World War; but it was only from the 1980s onwards that it began to be regarded as a legitimate field of research.

The first studies reflected the context in which they were conducted, analyzing the support provided by grandparents in times of war, when sons, sons-in-law, and husbands were on combat duty, and, in the post-war period, when young families began to migrate to urban areas, when access to education improved and the numbers of women joining the work force began to rise (Hernandez, 1993). In this same period, researchers, heavily influenced by Parsons, tended to analyze the relations between a possibly isolated nuclear family and the role of grandparents as caregivers. The United States was also experiencing a new demographic situation: it was the beginning of a huge spike in the birthrate. The so-called *baby boomers* were on the way.

The significant number of births registered in the post-World War II period would have an impact on the kinds of research carried out in the 1960s, when the functions and different styles adopted by grandparents were the main focus. Multigenerational studies gained ground and, as these were charted, grandparents and grandchildren became increasingly important sources of data. In this period, Neugarten and Weinstein (1964) wrote a pioneering work on the subject, attempting to group together and categorize the styles of grandparenting they found. The emergence of the field of gerontology, driven by the increase in life expectancy and the growth of the elderly population would also influence studies of intergenerational relations, since the role of grandparents and the activities they engaged in was a subject of interest to scholars in this field.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Theory of Disengagement<sup>1</sup> appeared on the scene and greatly influenced research, showing that the “role of grandparents” was one of the few significant roles left for the elderly, given that they were supposedly disengaged from social life and the world of work. The increase in the numbers of separations and

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<sup>1</sup> The Theory of Disengagement was one of the most important sociological theories of aging, arguing that it was natural, functional, and universal for the elderly to distance themselves from society. This period was also known as the “Golden Years” and regarded disengagement as a mutual process, in which society disengaged itself from the elderly in order to provide room for a younger work force, and the elderly person disengaged from society, in order to prepare to die (Cumming & Henry, 1961).



divorces occurring in this period also led to debate regarding research on grandparents in “times of crisis”. But it is only in the 1980s that studies of grandparenthood “emerges as a research topic in its own right rather than as an appendix to research on intergenerational kin and family relations” (Szinovacz, 1998, p.6).

Research began to focus increasingly on grandparents and issues such as the impact of divorce on intergenerational relations, the role of social grandparents, the support provided for the younger generations and situations where grandparents and grandchildren live under the same roof came onto the agenda of scholars in this field. Gender also began to emerge as an important variable and grandfathers, who had hitherto gone practically unmentioned in research, became a subject of study and debate. During this period, Cherlin and Furstenberg (1984) went back to the issue of styles – as explored exactly two decades earlier by Neugarten and Weinstein (1964) – in order to carry out an important comparative study, in which they addressed this question and analyzed variables including gender, race, ethnicity, the age of the grandchildren, and geographical distance. As Kornhaber (1996) puts it,

curiously, it is today that grandparenting history is being made – in research, in family life, in expansion of social roles and legal status, and in grandparents’ changing identity. Social scientists are now addressing grandparent roles, life meaning, and intergenerational interaction as a unique life stage in itself (p.20).

Although relations between grandparents and grandchildren had become a topic of interest to various areas and had grown in importance in the 1980s, few studies had been carried out to analyze the grandchildren’s own view of this relation, especially while they were still children (Cunha & Matos, 2010; Hagestad, 2008; Roberto & Stroes, 1995; Keck & Saraceno, 2008; Smith, 2005). This was in part due to the emphasis on gerontology in such studies, in which the testimony of and the roles played by the grandparents were more the subject of investigation than the testimony and roles played by the grandchildren, and to the difficulties that the field of sociology of childhood was having in establishing itself. The present study, therefore, was born out of the possibility of looking at this relationship from a different perspective; a perspective that does not appear much in gerontology, which restricts itself, for reason of the nature of its primary subject matter, to analyzing testimony coming from “the adult world” – normally interviewing grandparents and, in cases of intergenerational studies, including parents and grandchildren who are teenagers or in early



adulthood –, and a perspective that has still not been investigated sufficiently in studies of childhood, which rarely approach these relations from the point of view of the child<sup>2</sup>.

As a researcher, what brought me to this subject was my own training which was itself multigenerational and interdisciplinary. I had trained and worked as a primary school teacher, but had also had some experience in the field of gerontology. As Geertz (2006) puts it, “something is happening to the way we think we think” (p. 34):

[...] it is not only the interdisciplinary brotherhood, or even the learned eclecticism that have become necessary. It is a recognition, on the part of all those involved, that the lines that used to group academics into various intellectual communities, or (or which has much the same effect) divides them into different communities, are taking very eccentric turns these days (p. 39-40).

The issue of intergenerational relations had already been the subject of my Master’s dissertation, in which I investigated children’s views of old age (Ramos, 2006). On that occasion, I already touched on the children’s relationships with their own grandparents, figures who loomed large in their reports and in their daily experiences. When the issue of old age in childhood began to affect the way I perceived the world and operated in it as a researcher and as an individual, I began to see that grandparents – be they young or old – were everywhere: they played with their grandchildren in the park, took them to see a movie, crossed the city with them on buses, attended their birthday parties, picked them up from school, attended PTA meetings and read their grandchildren’s report cards. As Larrosa (2002) suggests,

[...] experience is something that passes through us, what happens to us, what touches us. Not something that passes by, not something that happens, or touches. Every day many things happen, but almost none of them happen to us. [...] Thus you are incapable of experiencing anything if you position yourself, imposes yourself, propose things, but do not “expose” yourself. You are incapable of experience if nothing happens to you, if nothing touches you, if nothing affects or threatens you (p.21 and p.25).

When I began to feel my way into and see this relationship, which had previously apparently been invisible to me, I also began to realize that this subject, which had been so often overlooked in the field of education, actually formed part of it. In the bosom of the family or at school, we often forget that the grandparents may also be as much as or more of a presence in the lives of the children than their own parents. It is often they who help our

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<sup>2</sup> In Brazil, Paulo Salles de Oliveira’s doctoral thesis – entitled *Shared Lives: the cultural world of relations between grandparents and grandchildren* (1993) – is still one of the main sources of information on the subject.



children with their homework; it is they whom the children ring from school when they are feeling sick or have hurt themselves; it is in their homes that the children stay after school. Moreover, in the very early years of childhood, when many children do not have access to pre-school facilities, it is the grandparents who stay with them and teach them their first words, the first letters of the alphabet and their first steps. Thus, grandparents are not only representatives of the children's family; they are important figures, who look after them and contribute to their growth and development.

On the other hand, being a grandchild is one dimension of childhood and, in their testimony, the children show that it is an experience that enriches not only the family, but also their own selves. The grandparents are part of the child's ego. Corsaro (1997c), writing about the future of childhood, notes that grandparents now play such a significant role in children's lives that they now appear on road signs in the city. In the photo reproduced on the right, taken in Modena, Italy, we can see that the sight of a grandfather taking his granddaughter to school is already so familiar as to merit a special sign in the public sphere.

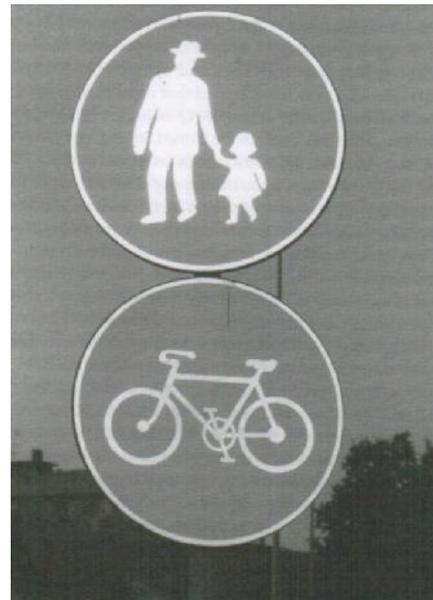


Fig. 1: Road sign in the city of Modena, Italy. (Source: Corsaro, 1997c, p.266).

Another important fact is that the greater life expectancy in combination with lower birth rates that has caused the population of the whole world to age<sup>3</sup> does not only affect people aged over 60. Children also feel these changes: since they have more vertical family relations, contact with their grandparents tends to last longer and there are less grandchildren per grandparent. According to Gauthier (2002), the fall in the number of grandchildren has also changed the character of intergenerational relations: "It seems easier to put a lot into one's relationships with one's grandchildren when there are only two of them than when there are 20 brought together for family celebrations" (p.297), the Canadian sociologist notes. However, few studies have analyzed how children perceive these relations, as if children had no say in the dialogue and the experiences shared by these two generations. According to Hagestad (2008), we are going through a kind of "generational

<sup>3</sup> According to WHO data (2010), by 2025 Brazil will have the sixth largest population of elderly people in the world.



myopia”: it is as if the demographic revolutions had consequences and were important for analysis only from the perspective of some age groups and generations. The Norwegian sociologist’s insight is shared by Leira and Saraceno (2008), when they remark that

[...] aging of population and kinships is examined mainly from the point of view of what happens to societies and to adults, including the elderly. Children’s experiences in aging societies and kinships have attracted much less attention. [...] Little is known about the grandchildren’s perceptions and experiences of the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren – including the experience of being the focus of attention and affection of many adults of different generations, but sharing it with few, if any, peers (p. 6).

It was these threads that came together to form the fabric of my research project and I would now like to invite the reader to enter into the world of these relations between grandparents and grandchildren from a perspective that is not that well known: that of the grandchildren themselves when they are still children. This study does not attempt to examine any specific aspect of this relationship, but rather to explore the field and create a *bricolage* using some of the various different pieces that make up this mosaic. The aim is not to produce a single fully rounded figure but to get to know some of the features that color and shape relationships between these two generations. In the dialogue reproduced below, between two children who took part in the study, Alex and Nanda, they explain how they understand the focus of this study:

Nanda [asking the researcher] – I would like to ask you a question... Why is your research about grandparents and not about children and their parents or children and their cousins?

[Before the researcher had time to answer, she herself comes to a conclusion]

Nanda – Ah, I know why! What you really want to know is how we get on with our grandparents, if we get on well or not, and what we do with them. That’s it, isn’t it?

Alex – It’s about how we get on with our grandparents! That’s it, Nanda!

Nanda – Yes, that’s it! *It’s a study about relationships!*

As a way of broadening our view of relationships between grandparents and grandchildren, the children interviewed here belong to four different kinds of family group: there are children who live in nuclear families (with their mother and father in the same house), single-parent families (with only one parent), reconstituted families (with a step-father or step-mother) and children who live with at least one of their grandparents. This allows us to bring together different situations in which the children interact with their biological or social grandparents, be they the parents of the parent who has custody or of the one who does not, grandparents who live under the same roof, or grandparents they



have never even met. This also allows us to examine this relation in the context of the fluctuations of the contemporary family, which may be subject to marriage, cohabitation, separation, divorce and remarriage. This is the everyday reality for many children and may determine the meanings they give to these relationships; hence the importance of looking at a variety of situations. As Sarmiento (2004) points out, the continuous process of transformation to which the family is subject means that it should “be conceived of as a social institution, and, as such, constructed and structured, and not as a natural entity immune to the pathos of social life” (p.17).

As far as social class is concerned, this research covers children from the “middle middle” and “upper middle” classes<sup>4</sup> (Quadros, 2011) – 16 boys and 20 girls, aged between seven and ten years – accessed through a private school in Porto Alegre, Brazil. These are families in which many of the parents have higher education (38% have a post-graduate degree, 38% a university degree, 22% have concluded high school and 2% primary school), and many of them are physicians, lawyers, engineers, psychologists, managers, realtors and bank-workers.<sup>5</sup> The monthly family income ranges across various income brackets, but most of the families receive between six and fifteen minimum wages<sup>6</sup>: 32% of the families live on an income of between six and ten minimum wages and 21% on an income of between ten and fifteen. However, there is a wide variation in income. A significant number of children have a monthly household income of more than fifteen minimum wages (18% of the families receive between 15 and 25 minimum wages and 11% more than 25), while 18% have an income equivalent to only between three and six minimum wages.

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<sup>4</sup> I use these terms, “middle middle” and “upper middle” class, to make it clear that, within the so-called “middle class” there are different sectors of the population, with significant differences in income, which makes the broader term somewhat ambiguous. According to the division suggested by Quadros (2011), the “upper middle class” is composed of people who “have access to better quality education, broad health care insurance coverage, good hospitals, dental treatment, psychologists, psychiatrists, gyms, language schools, travel, culture, leisure, entertainment and so forth.” (Quadros, 2011, [n.p.]). This group, according to this economist, is made up of small business people, physicians, engineers, university teachers, lawyers, and the like. The cut-off point is approximately R\$3,500 a month. The “middle middle class” includes managers, high school teachers, police officers, members of the armed forces, nurses, technicians and the like. The income bracket lies between R\$1,700 and R\$3,500 per month, “which is sufficient for its members, with some sacrifices, to lead a life similar to that of the upper middle classes, albeit at a lower level.” (Quadros, 2011, [n.p.]).

<sup>5</sup> Data on the level of education, profession and income of the parents were gathered by way of a form sent to the families and filled in by the parents or grandparents of the children interviewed (Appendix 1).

<sup>6</sup> As of the time this research was being conducted, the Brazilian minimum wage was R\$ 510.



As we can see, the families studied here have a wide range of different income levels, which demonstrates the economic diversity of the middle classes. However, social class is not characterized by income alone, but involves other factors people may have in common, such as level of education, profession, patterns of consumption and lifestyle. As Giddens (2005a) points out, “increasingly individuals are distinguishing themselves from others not on the basis of economic factors or occupation, but on the grounds of cultural tastes and leisure activities” (p.245). The fact that children from families with a wide range of different incomes attend the same school brings them together in some way – since they have similar lifestyles and opportunities in common –, and also reveals the extent to which parents are prepared to invest, even on a tight budget, in their children’s education as a way of ensuring they have “educational capital” (Singly, 2007). This stratum of the population was chosen for this research, because members of the less well-to-do classes frequently rely on grandparents for childcare as a result of the lack of financial resources and social services (Fonseca, 1999; 2004; Lichtenfels, 2007; Oliveira, 1999; Ramos, 2006), which is probably less of a determining factor among the middle classes. This would enable us to study situations where families are not necessarily dependent on intergenerational financial support.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first, entitled *Listening To Children As An Investigative Principle*, attempts to explain why children are generally absent from research and to stress the importance of seeing them as social players capable of participating in academic investigations. In this section, I retrace the emergence of the sociology of childhood as a field of research and present in some detail the methodological procedure developed for the field research with the children. I pay due heed to the concerns raised by Goldenberg (1997) says that

[...] one of the problems with qualitative research is that the researchers generally do not present the processes through which the conclusions were reached. The researcher should make these procedures clear to those who did not participate in the research, by way of an explicit and systematic description of all the steps in the process, from the selection and definition of the problems through to the final results from which the conclusions were derived (p.48-49).

There is a reason why this is the first chapter of the thesis. Before taking the form of a study of intergenerational relations between grandparents and grandchildren, the present study is, by its very nature and in principle, a study of children and, as such, seeks to contribute to this emerging field. Furthermore, I set out on the assumption that “the



methods should serve the aims of the research, not the research serve the aims of the methods” (McGuigan, 1997, p.2); and, for this reason, the methodology adopted here was carefully and creatively built up to serve this specific purpose and the analysis cannot be understood without understanding the process it formed part of. I therefore invite the reader, in so far as a thesis allows this and to the extent to which it is possible to convey this in the written word – since, as Geertz (1989) puts it, “the line between the mode of representation and the substantive content is as fine in cultural analysis as it is in painting” (p.11) –, to join me “in the field” and to participate in this exploratory, investigative and analytical exercise.

All the chapters of this thesis contain analysis which seeks to keep up with the flow of the children’s conversation and to give voice to the meanings they attribute to these relationships. On the basis of a comprehensive and careful reading of material produced in the field, I have been able to chart the various aspects that will be presented here, in the course of conversations with scholars from the “fields” of gerontology, sociology and education. I have sought to use my readings of Attias-Donfut and Segalen (1998; 2001; 2002) to put together some reflections that form the foundation of this thesis.

In the second chapter, entitled *The birth of grandchildren, the birth of grandparents*, I discuss, as the title suggests, the birth of a grandchild as an event that triggers the role of the grandparents. I investigate the influence of gender and age, trying to see these variables from the perspective of the children and in the light of their experiences. Is there a right time to become a grandparent? How does the relation between these two generations change over the years? How does gender tinge these relationships?

As the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is something that develops within the family, the third chapter – *Families, Children, and Grandparents* – seeks to investigate these issues. In this chapter, we find out more about the lives of the boys and girls and the differences and similarities between them. The children show us how they relate to their grandparents and how this relation is affected by divorces and remarriages, and by the ties created by the parents.

Grandparents and grandchildren spend time together mainly in the homes of the older generation. This is where they meet at weekends, for holidays, or when the grandparents are looking after the grandchildren. In the fourth chapter – *The Grandparents’*



*House* – the children tell us what this place means to us and take us through its rooms. By way of photographs they have taken, they show us the places they like most and tell us about their adventures, discoveries and learning experiences. Chapter 5, entitled *Relationships. Learning, Sharing, Teaching*, investigates what the children do with their grandparents when they are staying with them or visiting other places. Here the children tell us how they and their grandparents teach and learn things from each other, share experiences and care for each other. As Cornu (2007) puts it,

[...] co-existence does not imply merging together or one supplanting the other, nor even the mere fact of being together. [...] It is not just crossing paths or bumping into one another, as one does on the bus or in a busy street, but meeting, spending time together somewhere, in a square, on a bench, in a café, at the theater, on the beach, on the playing field, in the kitchen or on the sofa: it is sharing “common” moments, tasks, actions, spaces (p.55).

This conversation, which began with birth and moved through the children’s experiences of spending time with their grandparents, ends with reflections on finitude. The children tell us how they feel when a grandparent passes away and how they deal with death. This final reflection, which I have entitled *On Finitude*, closes the cycle, but it is not the conclusion of the research. I do not “aim to arrive at [...] a full, unquestionable, definitive answer” (Costa, 2005, p.206) or a conclusive one. I would also like to cite Valéry, who says that “work is never finished, it is abandoned” (in Geertz, 2006, p.14). Time also runs out, which means that what is being said is always restricted by what it is possible to say at a given point in time (Louro, 2004).

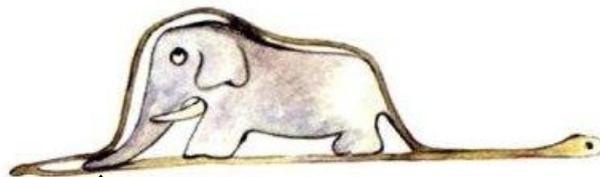
These are the premises upon which his thesis was built. Like Frida Kahlo, we shall see the memories of the grandparents’ home, the first steps taken at a grandparent’s side, the help with homework, the care-giving, the plants grown together in the garden, the day a grandparent taught a grandchild to ride a bicycle without stabilizers, the trips they went on together, the way they jumped about on the bed, the hot cake coming out of the oven, the sewing and the scrap-booking they did together, the hiding place behind the bathroom door, the shared secrets, the smell that only a grandparent has, the times of sickness, the noise of a cane echoing around the house; moments that build up memories of childhood, grandparents and grandchildren.

“Once when I was six years old I saw a magnificent picture in a book, called ‘True Stories from Nature’, about the primal forest. It was a picture of a boa constrictor in the act of swallowing an animal. In the book it said: ‘Boa constrictors swallow their prey whole, without chewing it. After that they are not able to move, and they sleep through the six months that they need for digestion.’

I pondered deeply, then, over the adventures of the jungle. And after some work with a colored pencil I succeeded in making my first drawing. I showed my masterpiece to the grown-ups, and asked them whether the drawing frightened them. But they answered: ‘Frighten? Why should anyone be frightened by a hat?’



My drawing was not a picture of a hat. It was a picture of a boa constrictor digesting an elephant. But since the grown-ups were not able to understand it, I made another drawing: I drew the inside of a boa constrictor, so that the grown-ups could see it clearly. They always need to have things explained.



The grown-ups’ response, this time, was to advise me to lay aside my drawings of boa constrictors, whether from the inside or the outside, and devote myself instead to geography, history, arithmetic, and grammar. That is why, at the age of six, I gave up what might have been a magnificent career as a painter. I had been disheartened by the failure of my Drawing Number One and my Drawing Number Two. Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them.”

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry  
(*The Little Prince*, 1981)

# Chapter 1

## *Listening to Children as an Investigative Principle*



*Dieser Kinder Welt (UNICEF, 2003)*

A study that focuses primarily on children must revert the historical tendency for children to be invisible and acknowledge that they are people with their own rights, aware of the world that surrounds them and capable of forging ties with other human beings. This is not to say that childhood has not aroused the interest of scholars in the past. References to children can be found as far back as the political and philosophical writings of Plato (428/427-348/347 BCE), but it is known that children were not recognized as being in charge of their own lives and knowledge of the world at this time. It can be argued that sociology, even though it has come to address the issue of childhood only in recent decades, has played a fundamental role in establishing a new discourse regarding children, since the idea of the child as an active social player, acquirer of knowledge and producer of culture, has



been widely discussed in this field. Until the mid-1990s, childhood was still addressed in a by-and-large pre-sociological fashion derived from the philosophical theories of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, and the psychological theories of Freud and Piaget, who regarded children as being inferior to adults, on the grounds, principally, of biological differences.

This pre- or non-sociological approach to childhood has been studied and analyzed by James, Jenks and Prout in *Theorizing Childhood* (2007), one of the classic British studies in the field of the Sociology of Childhood. In an attempt to deconstruct some discourses that have established certain “overriding truths” with regard to childhood, these authors identified five views of children, deriving from philosophy, developmental psychology and psychoanalysis, and showed how these views, which have been aired at various points in history and which continue to hold sway today, fostered an ‘unreal’ and idealized image of children, “examined not only in the absence of a concept of childhood as a social category of belonging, but also as a way of excluding the child’s own social context as a producer of the conditions of existence and the symbolic formation” (Sarmiento, 2007, p.29). These views, in so far as they do not take into consideration the children themselves as active social players and were developed in a context that is completely removed from the child’s real living conditions, took the form of abstract categories, responding only to the interpretative needs of adult society.

These pre-sociological views are brought up here, not for the purposes of producing an historical chronology of this phenomenon, but in order to arrive at a better understanding of how these models of childhood, divulged as “truth” since the onset of the modern period in the Western World, have come to influence everyday relations between adults and children and to produce “a myriad of practices” (Bujes, 2005, p.183) – of an educational, moral, and legal nature – aimed at this sector of the population. Such views are not vestiges of an age gone by. They continue to enjoy a powerful political and cultural legitimacy and to influence – either by way of syncretism or superimposition – and to guide much of our behavior towards children. In so far as these serve as a conceptual point of reference for public policy, they not only justify certain decisions, but also condition attitudes that actively seek out this artificially ideal image of the child (Belloni, 2006). Educational practices, school policy, and the role reserved for children in any given society are all broadly dependent on the



perpetuation of the way childhood is represented throughout the social fabric and it is thus of supreme importance to challenge its supposedly natural quality.

## 1.1 Pre-sociological Views of Childhood

- **The Evil Child:** The first pre-sociological view of the child identified by these authors is that of the “evil child”. This originated in the religious thinking of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the image of the child as a creature very close to nature and hence dominated by instinct rather than reason was propagated by Puritan doctrine and by the philosophical theories of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679). Children, being the fruit of “original sin,” were held to be demonic beings containing a Pandora’s box of dark powers that might be given full vent, where adults not to pay due attention or exercise the necessary discipline to prevent them from straying from the narrow, carefully demarcated path that civilization has prepared for them. Wickedness, corruption and infamy are part of children’s fundamental make up. They should thus be protected from exposure to environments that might trigger the emergence of these untamed, Dionysian forces by way of the “exorcism” of programs of discipline and punishment, whose aim was to prevent them from coming into contact with bad influences or developing bad habits.

In the view of D’Amato (2008), this conception of childhood is linked to a highly influential Western tradition that dates back to Plato. Plato was concerned with the consolidation of the Ancient Greek city-state and with the effects that a child’s upbringing might have on adult life. He thus promulgated the idea of children being physically and spiritually inferior to adults. In *The Laws*, Plato shows, in the dialogue between *Clinias* and *The Athenian*, that young people are incapable of containing the movements of their bodies or stilling their tongues; they shout, jump around, fidget and produce all kinds of noises that lack the rhythm and harmony that befit an educated adult (Plato, 1999, p.104). If, on the one hand, a child can be seen as a being of “pure possibility” (Kohan, 2003, p.16), formless and susceptible to manipulation through the teaching of his or her elders and betters, he or she is also the most difficult wild beast to tame, since the as yet unchannelled potential for



intelligence endows the child with a savage, unruly mischievousness, of which no other animal could prove capable.

- **The Innocent Child:** In reaction to this negative conception of childhood as corrupted by original sin and drawing on the new belief in the essential goodness of nature, a second pre-sociological view of the child emerged. This was that of the “innocent child.” Popularized by the philosophical writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), this view is based on the romantic myth of childhood as a pure and essentially good stage in life, untouched by sin. Pure in heart, the Rousseauian child is an angelic and idyllic creature, lacking only reason. The child is thus characterized by his or her innate propensity for education: “We are born weak, we need strength; helpless, we need aid; foolish, we need reason. All that we lack at birth, all that we need when we come to man’s estate, is the gift of education”, the author of *Émile* would have us believe (Rousseau, 1999, p.8). Children are needy and unfulfilled and adults – who are fully developed beings endowed with reason – should gradually make up for this lack, but they should rear children in such a way as not to stifle their better nature or corrupt their purity of spirit.

The relationship between adults and children is essentially asymmetrical. The child, innocent and unschooled in the ways of the world is heteronomous, needing the care and protection of adults until “fully grown, he or she needs no guide but himself or herself” (Rousseau, 1999, p.29). In the transition from childhood to adult life, the individual leaves behind heteronomy to become an autonomous being. In *Émile*, dependency is an intrinsic and natural feature of childhood. The child thus needs to be better protected, studied in more detail, and hence better understood.

*Émile* is the ultimate expression of the birth of modern childhood (Narodowski, 2001), which not only identifies the child as an unfinished subject, complete with his or her own needs and desires, but also identifies and lays down guidelines for our relationship with childhood as a form of education. For James et al. (2007), the pre-sociological discourse of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries surrounding the innocent child paved the way for our own contemporary view of childhood and laid the basis for a child-centered form of education and what Bujes describes as, “what,



until now, has been taken to be the *true meaning of childhood*” (Bujes, 2002, p.49) [emphasis added].

- **The Immanent Child:** The idea of the child as a vacuum, deprived of any knowledge, who develops by way of gradually growing contact with the surrounding world emerged as a third pre-sociological view of childhood among English scholars. The “immanent child” was the fruit of the empirical school of philosophy, which was first outlined by Aristotle (382-322 BCE), who argued that nothing can appear in consciousness, unless it has already passed through the senses: *nihil est in intellectu quod prius non fuerit in sensu*. This view was famously espoused by the English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704), who, in his seminal *Essay on Human Understanding* (1689), defended the thesis that the minds of children and idiots are blank slates, on which knowledge acquired through the senses is inscribed.

Locke criticized the innatist notion that human beings are born already endowed with certain principles and basic notions imprinted on their souls and argued instead that the child is a *tabula rasa*, capable of being molded by the environment and lived experience. In his view, careful observation of newborns furnished proof that there is “little reason to believe that they bring much in the way of ideas into this world” (Locke, 1999, p.51), since, besides vague notions of hunger, thirst, heat, and pain, they do not display the slightest manifestation of any well-established idea. Ideas are furnished gradually at a later stage, in no other way than “through experience and observation of the things they come across on life’s way” (Locke, 1999, p.51).

Although Locke’s epistemological viewpoint established the idea of the child as a vacuum – a “*no-thing*”, in the words of James et al. (2007, p.15) – it also cast doubt on the view of the child as *naturally evil*, which had been widespread up to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, insofar as the child was more the product of the environment he or she inhabited than a being determined by its own nature. Parents and teachers thus play a vital role in the lives of children, being able to *shape* them and program their minds with “vice or virtue, reason or unreason” (Sarmiento, 2007, p.32).

Locke’s investigations into the origins of human knowledge, which accord a crucial and defining role to the environment, led to a view of childhood that would



later pave the way for important contributions from behaviorists. Studies conducted by the North American behaviorists J. B. Watson and B. F. Skinner, would have a profound impact on the educational theories associated with directive pedagogy, which still pervade life in school today. In this perspective, education is teacher-centered and involves the transmission and inculcation of knowledge from teacher to pupil (the latter being conceived as an ignorant blank page). Positive attitudes are reinforced, while negative ones invite punishment.

- **The Naturally Developing Child:** The fourth pre-sociological view of childhood came from developmental psychology. Based on the genetic epistemology of Jean Piaget (1896-1980), “the naturally developing child” arose through an alliance between the human sciences and human nature. In his search for the psychogenesis of knowledge, Piaget went back, on the one hand, to two classic ideas from the human sciences – innatism/apriorism (the subject is equipped with endogenous structures that can be imposed on the environment:  $S \rightarrow O$ )<sup>7</sup> and the empiricism (knowledge comes about by way of exogenous information being furnished by the environment:  $S \leftarrow O$ ) – and went on to claim that the acquisition of knowledge is a relational process ( $S \leftrightarrow O$ ) arising from interaction between subject and object. On the other hand, Piaget delves into *the nature of the child*, postulating that knowledge is also built up “biologically, and this is indispensable from the perspective of genetic epistemology”, since, in his view, “psychogenesis will remain incomprehensible so long as it does not go back to its organic roots” (Piaget, 2002, p.56).

In his studies, Piaget portrayed a natural, universal, and inevitably maturing child. By way of experiments that aimed to measure, classify, and assess the relations established by children, he came up with a sequence of evolutionary stages, which move from the most elementary sensory and motor levels on to formal operations, on the basis of which the child was captured and monitored in his or her (ab)normal state, being regulated in such a way as to attain the *gold standard* of the ideal child. Taking these stages in biological development to be fixed and immutable, teachers, psychologists and parents came to judge children by way of tests and tables that were based on a linear and fictitious classification of human development.

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<sup>7</sup> Where “S” is the subject and “O” the object (environment).



Piaget's research had a powerful influence on educational thinking in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, forming the basis for relational pedagogy and the constructivist school of educational theory; it also served as a point of reference for various other studies in the field of education, such as Emília Ferreiro's psychogenesis of written language and Constance Kammi's studies of arithmetic. One outstanding feature of Piaget's investigative procedure was the profound respect he showed for the children, listening to them carefully and demonstrating an interest in their own explanations and ways of thinking. The idea of the child as an active being, which builds up its knowledge through interaction with the environment, would have a decisive influence on the bases of the New Sociology of Childhood. However, critiques done against the Piagetian model show that his brilliance is ultimately tarnished by his ahistorical, socially decontextualized and scientific approach (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2001), which, by failing to take into account the socio-cultural contexts and differences of the children, ended up generalizing, normalizing and homogenizing any genetic expression observed in child behavior.

- **The Unconscious Child:** This brings us to the final pre-sociological view of childhood: the "unconscious child". At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, investigations into the human psyche by the Austrian physician Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) had caused a turnaround in the way people think about children. By arguing that children too have sexual desires and that these may be incestuous in nature, psychoanalysis raised a question that had hitherto been considered taboo by the bourgeoisie: child sexuality. Freud, in his search for explanations of adult neuroses and psychoses not only developed a theory of child psychology – since childhood forms part of the past of every adult and is the locus of various situations that have structured his or her personality –, but also created a view of childhood that served as the structural and sustaining basis for adult psychopathology: "Child psychology, in my opinion, is destined to provide services as useful for adult psychology as studies of the structure and development of lower animals have proved useful for the study of higher ones", as he says in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1999, p.93).

By outlining the structure of a continuous line of psychosexual development in the child, starting from the basic act of breastfeeding, in which the baby is



absorbed in the erogenous pleasure of suckling at the mother's breast while it feeds, Freud laid out patterns of development and expected sublimations at the different phases he identified – the oral, anal, phallic, latency and genital phases – in order thereby to explain many of the deviations and psychological pathologies that arise in adult life. In so doing, Freud also provided recognition for the fears, anxieties and destructive tendencies of children, and his studies break down “the myth of childhood as paradise” (Aberastury, 1996, p.53). In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, he claimed that “a considerable number of the deviations from the normal sexual life observed later have been thus established in neurotics and perverts from the beginning through the impressions received during the alleged sexually free period of childhood” (Freud, 1949, p.147). It is as if “every libidinal stage [had] a virtual pathological structure”, as Foucault puts it in *Mental Illness and Psychology* (Foucault, 1975, p.20).

Childhood, according to Freudian psychoanalytical theory, furnishes the explanation and origin of adult psychopathological behavior and thus requires detailed observation and analysis. For Foucault (2002), it was precisely by being the science of childhood that psychiatry was able to establish itself as the standard for the analysis of human conduct:

It was not by conquering the whole of life, nor by going through the series of stages in the development of individuals from birth to death; it was, on the contrary, by increasingly limiting itself, analyzing more and more deeply the childhood, that psychiatry was able to become a kind of standard for the control of behavior in general, the appointed judge of behavior in general (p.392).

In the Freudian view, the psychic apparatus comprises the interaction of three elements, the Id, the Ego and the Superego. The Id (*Es*) is the focus of the drives in the personality. Governed by the “pleasure principle”, it is understood to be a grand reservoir of energy directed toward the satisfaction of desires and libidinal impulses. In order to be compatible with living in society, it needs to be limited and contained. The Superego (*Über-Ich*), or the “reality principle”, plays the role of censoring the Id, preventing the individual from fully satisfying his or her instincts and desires. The Ego (*Ich*) is oneself and is subject to the tension that exists between the demands of the Id and those of reality imposed by the Superego.



For Freud, the formation of the Superego is correlated with the decline of the Oedipus complex, which occurs when the child, “renouncing the satisfaction of its prohibited oedipal desires transforms its interest *in* its parents into identification *with* its parents” and thereby internalizes the prohibition (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1996, p.498). This occurs during the phallic stage, between three to five years of age, and marks the child’s entry into the latency period.<sup>8</sup> It could be said that, up to this time, Freud believed the child to be governed almost exclusively by the unconscious and untamed forces of the Id. As the Id is unconscious, the Freudian child, at least during its first years of life, is also unconscious. Hence the name given by British sociologists to the view of childhood developed by psychoanalysis.

## 1.2 *From pre-sociological to sociological childhood*

It can be seen that pre-sociological ideas of childhood start out from an idea of the child as located at the very beginning of the process of human development, which always sees the child in relation to that which he or she will one day become: a future autonomous adult, at the apex of maturity. This idea, based on a purely biological view, understands the child to be visibly lesser, weaker, and dependent on adults. For James et al. (2007), the developing child has an essentially “epiphenomenal” character: it is as if childhood was merely a transitory phase, a kind of ante-room where the character is prepared for his debut on the stage of adult social life. The background on which this preparation is based is the idea of society – or of a “good society” – that it is considered desirable to achieve. It is on this basis that the child will be educated and reared, turning him or her into an object of adult scrutiny.

Insofar as the pre-sociological child represents only a stage in this structural process, it is defined by *becoming*, an unfinished, imperfect being, marked by the lack of that which it needs to be added to its constitution. This lack, acknowledging the inherent *neediness* and *incompleteness* of children is not only healed by the care of adults – beings who are fully formed and have the capacity to look after children and instruct them throughout their passage through *nature and nurture* (Belloni, 2006) –, but also created and defined by

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<sup>8</sup> Many psychoanalysts, such as Melanie Klein, R. Spitz and Ferenczi would go on to show, in later studies, that some evidence of the Superego may appear prior to the Oedipus complex.



adults, as part of a game in which they make the decisions and organize, by way of scientific discourse and policies regarding childhood based on this discourse itself, the lives and interests of children.

Woodhead (1997), analyzing the use of the concept of “need” and its relation to childhood, notes that the terminology itself carries a considerable emotional charge, which stirs a sense of responsibility (something that needs to be done on behalf of the one in need) and places the individual in need in a passive and helpless condition. There also seems to be a direct relation between “need” and “well-being”, since needs that are not met may have a significant effect on a child’s development and its future adjustment to society. In the view of this British author, the discourse surrounding the neediness of children can be found at various points: in describing the child’s psychological nature (something that they possess and that is evident from their behavior); in inferring possible pathological consequences deriving from specific experiences; and in judging and prescribing which childhood experiences should be encouraged and valued in a given society.

By contrast, the sociological view of childhood understands it as a status and the child as a person, a full social agent who creates and recreates the society in which he or she lives. The sociological child is one that is active in building and determining his or her own social life. The child can no longer be seen in terms of *becoming*. The child is now a *being*. This new understanding of the child opens up the possibility of studying childhood as a social phenomenon that is important in itself, without subsuming it under some other topic such as the family or the school. Likewise child cultures can be studied as the expression of meanings that have been built up by the children themselves.

The sociology of childhood has attempted, from the very outset, to rescue children from the idea that they are a “first draft” for a larger project and to value them as subjects in the present. The reason why the *becoming* child is regarded as a cognitively immature being that is relatively inactive in society is not its “real” immaturity and inactivity, but the understanding that children are not active as adults are and do not have the same cognitive processes. This means that adults do not recognize the practices of children because the concept of competence is defined by their own practices, which creates, as Qvortrup (1994) points out, a strong power relation, since adults themselves establish what competence entails and children have no active say in the production of scientific knowledge. It was on



the basis of these assumptions that for such a long time children were not only ignored, but completely marginalized (Qvortrup, 1993) in studies conducted in the field of sociology itself.

Until the mid-1980s and early 1990s, it was relatively common for people to be reluctant “to accept the testimony of a child as a reliable and respectable source for research” (Quinteiro, 2005, p.21). It was believed that children were incompetent, inconsistent and needed to be accompanied by adults to ensure that they did not do anything inappropriate or become troublesome when participating as research subjects. Hence, when researchers wanted to know about the life of children, they did not ask the children themselves, but parents, teachers, and other adults who were considered more apt to respond appropriately to the researchers’ inquiries. People were concerned about a possible lack of “cognitive capacity” in children when responding to investigations and also had doubts regarding their ability to establish relations and come up with opinions (Scott, 2008).

Sirota (2001), writing about the emergence of a sociology of childhood among French scholars, illustrated this difficulty in an interview with the French sociologists, Viviane Isambert-Jamati, in 1993, in which she looked back on her research in the sociology of education:

[...] when I started out, we used to say that asking questions to children and young people was sociologically very difficult, because they were very changeable, unstable, which might have been interesting for psychologists, but which prevented them from constituting a true sociological population (Isambert-Jamati, 1993 in Sirota, 2001, p.51).

This reluctance to recognize children as legitimate subjects is the result of pre-sociological views of childhood and sociological theories that are themselves based on the deterministic and reproductivist models of socialization that held sway until the 1980s. According to these models, the child is a fragile passive being who is socialized by older generations in a vertical process of transmission and internalization of culture. As essentially asocial beings, children needed to be slowly adapted to the complex adult world and were socialized by an educational process that was developed first by the family and then school. This education consisted, in the words of Durkheim, of “a continual effort to impose on the child ways of seeing, feeling and action, at which they would not have arrived spontaneously” (Durkheim, 2007, p.6), as a way of preparing them for society.



This view of the child as a mere “depository” for the norms, beliefs, values and ideals of preceding generations represents, to some extent, an acceptance in an updated fashion of Locke’s theory of the *tabula rasa*, according to which the child is an object to be inserted non-problematically into adult culture, simply by reproducing the social norm. The child arrives on the scene with a clean slate and can be molded into the perfect social being. The malleability of children is one of the characteristics that is specifically singled out by Parsons (1988) as part of the process of socialization. In his view, children have three essential attributes that predispose them to socialization by socializing agents: *plasticity*, or their capacity to learn, *sensitivity*, or their capacity to form ties, and *dependency*, which could be considered fundamental to socialization, since children are held to be helpless and dependent on adults for their most basic functions.

Sociology in general and the sociology of education in particular were for a long time circumscribed by this conception of socialization and childhood, which contributed to the neglect of childhood as an object of sociological study (Sirota, 2001). Sociology was interested primarily, on the one hand, in the processes of socialization and, on the other, in the institutions responsible for guiding this process: the family and school. In both cases, children were not the formal object of study, since inquiries were directed to the socializing agents in these two institutions. Childhood was not the focus of attention, because sociology was not interested in childhood *per se*, but in the process of socialization.

It was in direct opposition to this conception of childhood as passively susceptible to the process of socialization that the first elements of a new sociology of childhood emerged. The (re)discovery of interactionist sociology, of phenomenology, and of constructionist approaches led to new studies of socialization that questioned functionalist precepts, demonstrating that children are subjects who are actively involved in the construction of their social lives and in the life of those around them. In the words of Sarmiento (2005), the “deconstruction of the concept of *socialization* is fundamental to the emancipation of childhood as a theoretical object and to the interpretation of children as fully social beings, capable of acting and being culturally creative” (p.374).

The aim of the new sociology of childhood came to be that of valuing children for their own sake, withdrawing gradually from an adult-centered view of childhood in order to move towards an approach increasingly more focused on the knowledge and the culture of



the children themselves. The constructivist model, based mainly on the theories of Vygotsky and Piaget would influence, despite some obstacles and limitations, this conception of the child as an active participant in education and learning. Corsaro's theory of "interpretative reproduction" (Corsaro 1997a), which presented a novel interpretation of the processes of socialization, was, for instance, heavily influenced by these authors.

But it was not only this change in the concept of socialization that led to the emergence of a new sociology of childhood. In fact, the term "sociology of childhood" can already be found in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of the work of Margaret Mead – *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) and *The Primitive Child* (1931) – and Ruth Benedict – *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946) –, both of whom were pioneers in promoting the idea of childhood as a socially constructed phenomenon (Cohn, 2005). These members of the *School of Culture and Personality* sought through their research to ascertain whether the behavior of children and teenagers was innate or culturally acquired. These landmarks in the anthropology of childhood called attention to new research methods and showed that the cultural experience of children could only be understood in context. However, their studies were steeped in an interpretation that reinforced the ideas of social reproduction and cultural transmission, without acknowledging the active potential of children.

Cohn (2005) points out that, from the 1960s onwards, changes in the concepts of culture, society and agency led children to be viewed differently in anthropology and that this certainly had an impact on the field of the sociology of childhood: "the concept of society is opened up to account for a continuous production of the relations that make it up" (Cohn, 2005, p.20), which no longer form a totality to be reproduced, but rather a set of relations and interactions in a constant process of being reproduced. The role of individuals in this process also changed, with individuals ceasing to be regarded as mere "receptacles for functions and roles" (Cohn, 2005, p.20) to become social agents who are constantly working to recreate the society in which they live. These revised versions of key concepts in anthropology would substantially change the way children were conceived:

Rather than being incomplete beings, in training for adult life, rehearsing social roles as part of the socialization process or acquiring competences and forming their social personality, [children] came to be seen to play an active role in determining their own condition (Cohn, 2005, p.21).



Influenced by this combination of factors, the sociology of childhood gradually developed as a new field of study. For Qvortrup (1995), the *boom* in interest in childhood among sociologists was not unrelated to a perception that childhood was a social problem. The fact that this occurred first (albeit independently) in industrialized countries, which had similar social characteristics in a global world, is a signal of this impact. The field, for example, was greatly influenced by the feminist movement, which, in the 1970s, raised the question of the role of women, motherhood and the family, casting doubt on the functionalist approach adopted principally by Talcott Parsons. Feminist theories, even though they addressed the issue of children only to question role of women as mothers, broke down traditional structures that contributed to transform the place of childhood in society. From the point when women dissociated motherhood from female identity – motherhood is not something that a woman is made for, but something she may choose to do –, policy regarding early infancy had to be substantially rethought, culminating, in the late 1980s, in the appearance of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which marked “the point when children acquired the status of subjects and dignity of being a person” (Sirota, 2001, p.19).

It can be seen that interest in children was sporadic and intermittent, emerging in research, thanks to a nexus of contextual factors. As Qvortrup (1995) reminds us, it was only in 1990, almost a century later than educationalists, psychologists and psychiatrists, that sociologists of childhood met for the first time to debate the subject, during the World Congress of Sociology, in Madrid. Before this, only a few isolated voices, principally in the Nordic countries, were trying to bring up the issue of children. In 1982, the British sociologist, Chris Jenks published *The Sociology of Childhood*, which brought together texts by various authors, such as Margaret Mead, Jean Piaget and Philippe Ariès, in an attempt to show that childhood is a social construction, made up of different socially contextualized discourses.

In 1985, the Danish sociologist, Jens Qvortrup, began to write about the place of children in the division of labor, thereby laying, as Lourdes Gaitán (2006) put it, the “cornerstone” of the Sociology of Childhood. In 1987, Qvortrup produced a special edition on this field of research in the *International Journal of Sociology* and, in the same year, launched the *Childhood as a Social Phenomenon* project, at the *European Center for Social*



*Welfare Policy and Research*, in Vienna. This study examined the social circumstances of children in sixteen industrialized countries, gathering information on the place of children in society, in the family, in the economy, and in the eyes of the law.

In North American literature, a movement towards the sociology of childhood can be observed during the 1920s, when sociologists connected to the Chicago School – William I. Thomas, Dorothy S. Thomas, Stanley P. Davies, E. W. Burgess and Kimball Young – began to show an interest in the exchanges and interactions of children. However, this new line of research did not survive for more than a decade, being stifled by the monopoly built up by psychologists in this field of research, the lack of financial resources, the methodological obstacles encountered by a developing field, and the decline of the Chicago School itself, with the rise of Parsonian theories that dealt primarily with social action rather than social actors and were thus less conducive to the development and spread of a sociology of childhood (Montandon, 2001). In the United States, the sociology of childhood re-emerged when, in 1984, the *Society for the Study of Symbolic Interactionism* held a session of studies of childhood that led, in 1986, to the publication of the periodical, *Sociological Studies of Child Development*, edited by Patricia and Peter Adler. It was in this journal that Anne Marie Ambert published the classic article, *Sociology of Sociology: the place of children in North American sociology*, in which she showed the extent to which childhood had been overlooked in the field of sociology, especially in North America.

Things were no different in Brazil. Although some significant work focusing on child culture had appeared in earlier decades<sup>9</sup>, it was only in the late 1990s that the sociology of childhood began to spread as a specific field of study. Internationally, the field was, at this same time, included by the *International Sociological Association* (ISA) research committee and by work groups associated with the *International Association of French-Speaking Sociologists* (AISLF).

According to Maggioni (2008), four principal points can be identified as forming the basis of this new “sociological” view of childhood: children are members of a general

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<sup>9</sup> Examples include Florestan Fernandes (1947), who examined spaces used for the socialization of children in working-class neighborhoods in the city of São Paulo; or *The Child's Perception of Space* (1979), in which the architect, Mayumi Watanabe de Souza Lima, examined the spaces, mainly schools, produced for children and put together projects with the active participation of the children themselves. Likewise José de Souza Martins's, *Massacre of the Innocents: children without childhood in Brazil* (1993), in which the author selects children to talk about their living conditions in rural parts of Amazônia, making observations regarding their work spaces, study, and play (Quinteiro, 2005).



category (childhood), which is permanently present in society; they produce culture and perform socially autonomous processes; as socially private and individuated subjects, they require new priorities and rights; and, as full social players, they are capable of expressing their own points of view that are relevant not only in their everyday dealings but for society as a whole. However, sociologists of childhood, even though they have some features in common, tend to cluster around different and not necessarily compatible interests and theoretical schools of thought, which have laid the groundwork for the sociological exploration of the different settings of contemporary childhood.

### 1.3 Towards a Sociology of Childhood

It can be argued that the sociology of childhood is organized around three main views that focus on *socio-structural*, *constructionist* and *relational* features. Exploration of different situations and interests from these three points of view has brought to light the complexity of the child's world, pointing out some of the various factors that determine it and questioning the constitutive bases of the concept. I believe that childhood, as an object of study, requires understanding of this network of relations and, from this less deterministic perspective on childhood (according to which it is socio-structural or constructionist or relational), we can see in these shifts of focus things that our blinkered point of view often overlooks. Let us delve a little deeper into these three paradigms – or three sociologies of childhood, as Alanen calls them (2005) – and explore how they overlap.

As a *structural* part of society, childhood is riddled with both diachronic changes (relating to historical events) and synchronic differences (between different cultures and within one and the same society), which means that children are constantly interacting with other generations and social groups. As a permanent part of the structure of society, childhood will never cease to exist, even though the members of the group are constantly changing and the group undergoes variations throughout history (Qvortrup, 1991). It can thus be said that childhood is, above all, a generational category, a group of social actors who possess common features that do not depend on their geographical setting, class, gender, race or point in time. This does not mean that childhood is something universal or that the particularities of specific groups of children should be ignored. The adoption of the term “childhood”, in the singular, refers to the search for the habitual characteristics of



children, in such a way as not to superimpose that which is unique and particular on that which children share in common.

This approach, which is more likely to involve quantitative studies, looks for the macro-social parameters and components that decisively influence the lives of children as an age group. The distribution of economic resources between children and adults, the investigation of the role schoolwork plays in the economy, the rights and duties of children, as well as their place (or the lack of it) in socio-demographic surveys are some of the aspects that can be investigated regarding childhood as a global social structure. In the same way, when childhood is taken to be a generational category (like that of adults and the elderly) it is possible to carry out comparative studies of the different generational groups in a single society (since these are influenced, albeit in a diverse fashion, by similar societal parameters); of the circumstances of children living in the same local context, but at different times in history; and, by surveying sets of variables, of international and intercultural differences. In the introduction to *Childhood Matters*, a book that sums up the more important ideas of the *Childhood as a Social Phenomenon* project, Qvortrup (1994) clarifies this position:

So, even though we are very well aware of the fact of the existence of several, indeed, many childhoods, we have chosen to think mainly in terms of *childhood* as such in one country or in industrial society. This means in other words that childhood is used as a structural concept: childhood is perceived as a structural form or category to be compared with other structural forms or categories in society (p.6).

However, if, on the one hand, childhood is a universal structure that can be analyzed in terms of its common features, on the other, it is also a *social construction*, which is local and highly particular. Distinct cultures, economic history, ethnic and religious characteristics, as well as gender and individual life histories, create different experiences of being a child and different childhoods. For this reason, in building up what James and Prout (1997) called “a new paradigm” in the sociology of childhood, childhood is understood to be *a variable* in social analysis which can never be fully divorced from other variables such as class, gender and ethnicity.

The *constructionist* perspective brings up the idea that there is no one, non-temporal, essential, immutable standard childhood. This idea, which was handed down to us by the Modern Period, is no more than an “ideal of childhood: worldly, dated, socially constructed”



(Bujes, 2005, p.186). For this reason, studying childhood also entails calling into question this natural, homogeneous, universal childhood that was invented and put about by pre-sociological discourses, and de-naturalizing its construction and shifting the focus to the discursive and non-discursive practices of which it is made up. This means recognizing that there are *multiple childhoods* and that, because of this plurality, childhood cannot be grasped as a totality. Childhood is not an unfinished project. As it is in a constant process of constitution and reconstitution, it is constantly multiplying, becoming more diverse, and, as Dornelles (2005) puts it, evading our grasp.

In the attempt to denaturalize the idea of childhood as a finished project closed in on itself, *relational* aspects of its constitution also emerge. As a social construction, childhood is something invented, an arbitrary fragmentation based on a universally-occurring phenomenon that is part of the natural cycle of life. Ariès (1981) pioneered the view that childhood, as a social category, is a relatively recent construction, having emerged only in the Modern Period. This does not mean, obviously, that there were no “young human beings, who grew in the womb, were born, breast-fed, and reared [...], but rather that they were not accorded the same social and subjective significance” as they were in later centuries (Corazza, 2002, p.81). Awareness of the particular nature of childhood and the birth of a “feeling of childhood” would emerge by way of a growing distinction between the world of children and that of adults. A corollary of this process of *differentiation* of the one from the other is a process of *identification* of who belongs to the world of the child and who to that of the adult, in such a way as to create two distinct categories, identified not only by biological age, but also by a series of cultural interventions, seen in dresses, habits and day-to-day activities.

Who decides who belongs or does not belong and who is included or excluded has the power to determine what childhood and adulthood mean. As children do not have an active say in society, being permanently under the tutelage of their guardians, it is adults, who, with the authority of *experts*, will define themselves as the normal, natural and desirable identity and view children as different and incomplete in relation to them. The very etymology of the word *infant*<sup>10</sup> – derived from Latin *infans*, meaning one who does not

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<sup>10</sup> [Translator’s Note: whereas in English the term ‘infant’ does tend to be restricted, as the Latin origins of the word suggest, to the time of life before language acquisition, in Portuguese, and other neo-Latin languages, equivalent forms are used to refer to childhood in general.]



speak – reveals the position to which children were relegated from the outset: the age of negativity. The age of the absence of language, the lack of reason, physical weakness, moral incompetence, the age of the unfinished. By way of discourse that normalizes these relations according to adults' own interests – children are naturally evil, innocent, immanent, developing or unconscious –, adults will churn out these images and representations of childhood again and again, to the effect that the identity of being an adult is not seen as *an* identity, but as *the* identity: the central, legitimate, non-problematic position.

Since “saying what we are implies also saying what we are not” (Silva, 2004, p.82), to claim to have an adult identity automatically entails marking off that which differs from it: namely childhood. Neither can exist without the other. This is why adults need children: “to provide them access to their own identity, to the enigma of what they are and what they are not; so that they can better understand, by way of the contrast, their own essence; so that they can determine and pin down their own status of normality” (Corazza, 2002, p.200). By infantilizing children, adults shore up their own identity. Hence, just as the concept of gender was important for analyzing relations between men (identity) and women (difference), the concept of generation is the key concept for understanding relations between adults and children.

Subverting this order by recognizing children as active subjects and not as mere potential beings on the way towards the non problematical and natural status of adults, is one of the greatest challenges of the sociology of childhood. As children belong to the only age group that does not conduct research, since they are not allowed to write about themselves in the capacity of *experts*, sociologists of childhood have an important role to play in subverting this order, which is that of providing a voice for child cultures, registering their exchanges, games, peer cultures and the child's own point of view regarding this silent, black-and-white photograph in which they have been portrayed. This means that childhood should be studied and researched as the basis for establishing connections between its different contexts and fields of action and that the main objective of the methodologies used should be to derive data from the children's own actions and productions in the children's own words.

Understanding the various kinds of childhood in this new way, as an object of study that comprises a specific generational field is to try to understand childhood as an *event*; it is



to be able to deal with them in the materiality of their unpredictability, as beings in permanent movement. Thinking in this way allows childhood to be regarded as a unique phenomenon, as something whose difference is constituted by its relationship to itself and not in relation to another generational identity (Dornelles, 2010). By switching discourses and deconstructing that symbolic shroud that modernity has cast over the various forms of childhood, the provisory nature of its truths is called into question. In the view of Kohan (2004), it is possible to image two kinds of childhood: “one is the childhood of the majority, that of chronological continuity, history, stages of development, of majorities and their effects” (p.5), and the other is that of the minorities,

[...] childhoods affirmed as experience, as an event, as a break with history, as a revolution, as resistance and creativity. Childhoods that make history and change history, which find themselves in details; childhoods that resist concentric, branching, totalizing and totalitarian movements (Kohan, 2004, p.5).

Developing research projects that adopt the point of view of the children is not a simple process. It is necessary to recognize that adults and children “have a different way of knowing, living, experiencing, and acting in the world” (Alanen, 1994, p.41) and that, however kindly we approach them and gain their trust, we shall never be able to conduct our research as if we *were* children, for the simple fact that we are not. Studies of children are inevitably the work of adults. It is adults who organize and interpret what they see and hear in the field. Hence, one of the greatest questions that arises for sociologists of childhood is that of a possible “epistemological contradiction” between a sociology from the point of view of the children and a theoretical-methodological construct for the most part built up by adults.

But what does it mean to study children on their own terms? Is it to see society as if we were children or to adopt their point of view in order to explain social phenomena? Just as men can conduct research on women, heterosexuals on homosexuals, young people on the elderly (and *vice versa*), it might not be impossible, in my view, for adults to conduct research on children. If Geertz (2006) is correct in asserting that one does not need to be a native to *argue* from the point of view of the natives, we could likewise say that one does not need to be a child to *argue* from the child’s point of view. However, it is necessary to develop “the ability to analyze their modes of expression” (Geertz, 2006, p.107) – and this requires a “decentering of the adult point of view as a precondition for perceiving that of



children” (Sarmiento & Pinto, 1997, p.26) – and it is necessary for the children – or the natives – to accept the researcher “as a being with whom it is worth talking” (Geertz, 2006, p.107).

For this reason, I believe that the great challenge of the researcher is that of being creative: of having the creativity to succeed in approaching one’s object of study and the subjects with whom one wishes to enter into dialogue, the ability to keep this spark of dialogue alive, the intellectual stamina to read this “strange, faded manuscript, full of gaps [and] inconsistencies” (Geertz, 1989, p.7) which is the unknown world of the other and the skill to transform this reading into a new text. Put differently, adopting the point of view of the children does not mean just recognizing them as lawful subjects, but looking for research tools and mechanisms that reconfigure the existing differences between adults and children, centering the analysis as far as possible on what the children themselves say. To search for their truths is to understand that

[...] the child arrives at the truth in the very moment that he or she appears as a singular and unrepeatable individual, as a pure difference that cannot be reduced to any concept, as a pure presence that cannot be reduced to any cause, condition or grounds, as a reality that can never be treated as an instrument, as a pure enigma staring us in the face (Larrosa, 2006, p. 196).

The “truths” of childhood need to be understood “in terms of what the children themselves say, think, feel and do” (Felipe, 2004, p.4). Perhaps so little is known about them because “children are rarely asked and rarely listened to” (Quinteiro, 2005, p.21).

Regarding this search for a child-centered methodology, Punch (2002) argues that there are three different ways of listening to them. The first involves thinking of children as not having any specific peculiarities and thus applying the same investigative methods as one would with adults. The second assumes precisely the opposite, understanding children as being very different from adults and requiring special investigative methods involving long and/or repeated observation, as in ethnography<sup>11</sup>. The third way – which is the one adopted here – understands the child as having different abilities from those of adults, although they are not thereby any less competent or reliable, and can thus participate in various different methodological approaches, so long as these are “refined” so as to be compatible with the children’s way of expressing themselves, allowing for the use of drawings, games, text and

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<sup>11</sup> However, it is worth pointing out that ethnography is not used only by researchers who see children as being different from adults.



image; i.e. the use of the discursive and non-discursive practices that emerge in their day-to-day lives.

This way of building up a methodology requires, as Sarmento (2004) reminds us, the four structural axes of child culture and the basis on which children move around in the world to be taken into account: *interaction*, *play*, *make-believe*, and *repetition*. *Interaction* refers to the many exchanges that children enter into in their everyday lives, be it with their peers or with groups of adults, providing spaces for sharing and learning. Through this interactive contact, children are capable of appropriating, re-inventing and reproducing the world that surrounds them. Sarmento reminds us that this occurs both in relations between children and adults and in relations among the children themselves. This interaction also involves learning, insofar as they learn and teach rules, agreements, rites and games. *Play* is the second axis described by Sarmento. Play is a fundamental trait of child culture, as it is one of the most important human social activities, both among children and adults. Sarmento remarks that, for children, play occurs differently, since they tend to engage in it and give themselves up to it continuously in their everyday lives: jumping over stones in the middle of the street, playing games with friends at school, with industrially-produced toys or those of their own invention, with pencils and buttons. “Unlike adults, they do not distinguish between playing and doing things seriously, since play is the most serious thing that children” (Sarmento, 2004, p.25).

The third axis is *make-believe*. By way of this, children build up their view of the world and attribute meanings to the things that surround them. The dichotomy between fantasy and reality is described by Sarmento as being something very fragile, the two sides being, in children’s culture, extremely inter-related. “There is an underlying ‘non-literality’ to the specificity of the world of the child and this is a central element in the capacity of children to face up to painful or shameful situations” (Sarmento, 2004, p.26). It is through fantasy that children create a world beyond this world, giving voice to their imagination and producing explanations that, to adults, would seem less tangible and real. The fourth axis is *repetition*, the non-linearity of time. For children, time is recursive, “continually reinvesting in new possibilities, unmeasured time, always capable of being restarted and repeated” (Sarmento, 2004, p. 28). As Sarmento puts it, it is the time of ritualized practices (now it’s my



turn... now it's yours), continuity (and so... and so, and then... and then) and abrupt breaks (I'll *never* play with you again), which they will probably go back on soon.

Examination of these four axes can contribute to developing methodological approaches for the study of children. Conducting research involving children involves coming up with strategies that are compatible with their own interests and routines, providing situations that enable them to participate actively in the investigation. Hence, although we can use methods similar to those used when talking to adults, these will often have to be adapted to the world of the child, taking into account factors such as age, routine, social class, language, and literacy. The methodological plan followed here was built up with all these aspects in mind, with a view to understanding the interactions between children and their grandparents in a way that is based on the point of view of the children themselves.

## 1.4 *Research with Children: building a methodology appropriate to the object of study*

### 1.4.1 *Defining the field: the choice of location*

The study of children in context has been defended by various authors (Graue & Walsh, 2003; Mayall, 2008; Scott, 2008) as a more concrete opportunity to engage in detailed observation of the spaces children move around in and the characteristics of their own local life. In *risk societies* (Beck, 1998), the context in which children operate are increasingly conditioned by supervision and regulation on the part of adults. The “world outside the home” has been identified by parents as a world in which children should be carefully protected, their movements restricted and the safety their social contacts and the spaces they move about in assured. Moral, physical and sexual dangers, which appear daily in the news headlines, reflect the lack of security of contemporary life. Studying children in their real life contexts thus entails, at least among the Brazilian middle class, carrying out the research in institutional settings, since the extracurricular activities of children of this class are mostly restricted to closed, school-like environments. This is different from children of less privileged backgrounds, who spend a good part of their spare time performing household chores (especially in the case of girls) and practice leisure activities on the street (Carvalho & Machado, 2006).



Sports activities in private clubs and schools, playing in the playground of closed condominiums, visiting shopping centers, attending language classes and having drawing and painting lessons in private studios provide free-time activities for children in institutional settings that not only look after the children while their parents are at work, but also develop multiple skills for competing in the modern world. The need for care and all-round development of children has led childhood to become increasingly privatized and encased in a system of protection and control that has gradually been extending from the family to the various child care agencies.

Studying children in such settings is not necessarily easy, since permission needs to be obtained from various quarters. While research involving adults requires only the “simple” consent of the subject, research with children depends, before the consent of the child itself, on permission being granted by a large number of adults responsible for him or her. This means that the process requires intensive and considerably laborious negotiations. The presence of a researcher in a school or in other teaching institutions is not always seen as something positive, since it upsets the school routine, puts a stranger in contact with the children, requires teachers to adapt their lessons around it, and, from the point of view of teachers and coordinators, may be seen to have little to do with the teaching goals of the school. Although research promotes discussion among parents and professionals who work with children, helping to build their knowledge of childhood, the presence of a researcher in the field may be hampered by the “well-intentioned” protective attitude of the institutions, stemming from negative experiences with other researchers or a belief that this has nothing to do with school or with the children’s lives. For this reason, gaining access is considered by Alderson (2008) to be one of the most difficult stages in developing research involving children.

Nevertheless, the choice of the location for the study can be facilitated if the researcher has previously established relationships with the children in other settings, such as clubs and schools attended by children or nieces and nephews, and has built up friendships with parents or professionals who work with the children. A prior reference can be a decisive factor in an institution’s decision to accept the study. For my part, this was an important factor in the choice of school and gaining access to it. The school at which this study was conducted was my place of work for around four years and I developed strong



professional and personal ties with the people who work there. Furthermore, it also met some important research criteria, such as being located in a major city, in an urban part of the city, and attending middle- and upper-middle-class children. It is a Catholic school providing education from kindergarten to middle school for around 1,400 children who study in the morning or in the afternoon. As it is located in a fairly central area, it receives children from various neighborhoods, which allows for a more general and less local view of the living conditions of this class in the State capital. During the survey conducted among children in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years, for example – on which more details will be given below – it was found that the children came from 33 of the 79 official neighborhoods in the city.

First contact was made with the school in January 2010, when I sent a copy of my research project proposal to the coordinator and pedagogical supervisor of the initial grades (Appendix 2), explaining the purpose of the research and the methods to be used. As I was in Germany at the time, since my Doctorate is a *cotutelle* course, the first contact was made by email. My purpose in sending this email in advance was to ensure that I could start working in the field as soon as possible, since my study grant would allow me to leave Germany for only three months. However, I had to wait until March to be able to really see the ideas outlined in the project proposal take on concrete form.

When I arrived in Brazil, I had a meeting with the pedagogical coordinators of the initial grades of school (the coordinator, the supervisor and the psychologist), followed by another meeting with the school's director of *Innovation, Research and Educational Technology*, in order to explain the research project in person and to make some practical arrangements. On this occasion, we also signed the *Institutional Term of Consent* (Appendix 3) and introduced myself to the school's new head and deputy-head, explaining my research to them also and thanking them for providing me with the opportunity to conduct it in their school. I gave everyone a printed copy of my research proposal – which they had already received by email.

However, the development of my research did not only depend on the good-will and permission of supervisors, coordinators and head-teachers. It also depended on the participation and permission of the teachers, who would represent my direct point of contact with the children. As I am a teacher myself, I always tried to put myself in the place of these colleagues and try to ensure that my methodology interfered as little as possible



with their teaching routine. I also wanted them to know exactly what I was going to do, so that they would feel included in the process. This has always been a fundamental ethical principle of mine. I remember how, when working as a primary school teacher, I was approached on countless occasions by researchers who provided neither teachers nor children with very much information about their research and came to take my pupils away without warning, with little respect for my lesson planning or the in-class learning process. Therefore, one of the first things I asked the school's pedagogical coordinators was whether I could talk in person with the teachers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years<sup>12</sup>, with whom I would be working<sup>13</sup>. The conversation cited below, which occurred with a child later when the field research was already underway, neatly illustrates the situation described above:

Alexandre – I am doing two researches: one [...] and one with you.

Researcher – Great! What's the other one about?

Alexandre – *I don't know. They didn't tell me...*

Researcher – Have you done it before?

Alexandre – Yes. You have to do some really hard things!

Luca – Did they invite you or did you want to?

Alexandre – No. They invited us. *They sent a piece of paper to my parents inviting me* and if we missed a lesson they didn't help us copy it!

[Alexandre, explaining how he was included in another study – 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting]

So, at a teachers' meeting occurring in mid-March, I presented myself to the group (some of the teachers had previously been my colleagues) and explained the purpose of the research, handing each of them a copy of my project proposal. This meeting was fundamental for the development of my research methodology. Talking with the teachers, I recognized that they were willing to help, but that, at the present point in time, with the children still adapting to school, holidays and Easter and Mother's Day activities to integrate the children, the first parents' meetings, planning of evaluation and little time between one lesson and another, they would not have much time to work with the children. So, we collectively agreed that, instead of working with only two or three classes, as envisaged in my project proposal<sup>14</sup> (selected with the consent of the teachers and according to a prior

<sup>12</sup> The teachers I am referring to are the class teachers and not those who teach special subjects, who did not take part in his research.

<sup>13</sup> The choice of these years was agreed with the school. As the first year is taken up with the initial stages of learning how to read and write and the parents are especially anxious about this, we thought it best to exclude this year from the research. We also excluded the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, since, in mid-April, the children in this year were to take part in another study.

<sup>14</sup> As can be seen from the methodological sections of the project proposal (Appendix 2), the study initially envisaged setting up four groups of children (one for each family constellation) for each class. These would be



survey of the children's family constellation), I would work with all six classes, but devoting less time to each. This would clearly increase my work-load, since I had move around six different working environments. However, having time with all the children was an important requirement of the teachers and I was prepared to adjust my plan to accommodate their needs. Being attentive to the needs of both teachers and the children as pupils – a point to which I shall return later – is an ethical principle that I consider especially important for researchers working in schools. The teachers need to be seen as the researcher's allies; and it is thus important they be listened to and their needs taken into account.

I thus took note of the timetables of the six teachers and organized my interventions in the three 3<sup>rd</sup> year classes (one in the morning and two in the afternoon) and the three 4<sup>th</sup> year classes (one in the morning and two in the afternoon) around these. I came to an agreement with the teachers as to the best times for me to intervene, taking care not to interfere in the timetable for the various special subjects (English, PE, Computing, Library Study, Music and Robotics, which are taught by outside teachers). The table that follows (which was also given to each of the teachers and school coordinators) shows the amount of time that I spent in each of the classes during a period of three weeks, when I started conducting interviews. I shall go back to this later, but first I would like to report on my first contact with the children and the way in which I put together the group to be interviewed.

**Table 1**  
Timetables of the Six Classes

Morning						
Periods:	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	
1 <sup>o</sup> - 7:30 – 8:20	Class 31	Class 41	Class 31	Class 41		
2 <sup>o</sup> - 8:20 – 9:10	Class 31	Class 41	Class 31	Class 41		
3 <sup>o</sup> - 9:10 – 10:00	Class 41	Class 31	Class 41	Class 31		
Break						
4 <sup>o</sup> - 10:20 – 11:10	Class 31	Class 31	Class 41	Class 31		
5 <sup>o</sup> - 11:10 – 12:00	Class 41					

taken out of class for an interview once a week for six weeks. As each group would be taken out of class on a different day of the week (Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, for example), the teachers would only have one day a week to carry out group work with their pupils for the whole duration of the lesson. The new plan enabled them to have three full days free of interference on my part to work with all their pupils.



Afternoon					
Periods:	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1 <sup>o</sup> - 13:10 – 14:00	Class 33	Class 43	Class 42	Class 43	Class 32
2 <sup>o</sup> - 14:00 – 14:50		Class 33			
3 <sup>o</sup> - 14:50 – 15:40	Class 32		Class 42		
Break					
4 <sup>o</sup> - 16:00 – 16:50	Class 32	Class 42	Class 43	Class 42	Class 33
5 <sup>o</sup> - 16:50 – 17:30					

### 1.4.2 Getting to know the Children: the first contact

On 22 March 2010, after two weeks of negotiation with teachers and coordinators, I first met the children. I arrived at the school at 7:20 am and made my way to the staff room. I sat down in an armchair in one of the corners of the room, which had been used, since I worked there, by teachers of the younger children in the school. As I waited for the bell, I felt a bit uncomfortable about sitting there; after all, I had not been a teacher there for some years. Nevertheless, I knew the place and the people who came and went so well, that I soon began to feel at home again and that I had a right, even as a researcher, to be part of the school routine and a party to what went on in the staff room. I was also invited to join the teachers in their activities, praying before class, having lunch with them in the school canteen, talking with the parents of my former pupils in the playground, exchanging the odd word with former students, now teenagers, in the school corridors. All of this made me feel more a part of the school, albeit in a new role. My presence in the staff room helped me to maintain contact with the teachers. There we made together, when necessary, some alterations to the research plan – that arose because the children had not yet finished an activity or because there was a holiday or a school trip – and we got to know each other better, creating new ties and establishing a certain intimacy.

My introduction to the six classes was more or less the same. First, I was introduced to the children by the coordinator/supervisor or by the teachers themselves and then I was allowed to speak to the children myself. I was especially anxious about this, because I wanted to let them know about my research bit by bit, in a way that would gradually awaken the interest of the children. I wanted them to know me better before deciding to participate; I wanted them to understand how much I was interested in what they did and thought and how this was really important for my research. So I decided to start with something that I believe children and researchers have in common: curiosity. Inspired by a book that I used to



frequently read to my pupils – *A Curiosidade Premiada* [*Curiosity Rewarded*], by Fernanda Lopes de Almeida (1999) – I planned my first intervention around the idea of establishing interactive contact with the children. It would be a complete contradiction for me to be there to listen to the children’s point of view and to introduce myself by way of a monologue: “my name is, I am so and so, I do what, I’ve come here to, I’d like to...” and so forth. I wanted to try to establish *a dialogue* from the very start. So, I began more or less like this:



Fig. 2: Glorinha, from *Curiosity Rewarded*. [Where are you going? What’s in that bag?]

“Hey, guys! As your teacher just said, my name is Anne Carolina and I’m a researcher.” [As I spoke, I watched the faces staring at me in silence]. “Does anyone know what a researcher is?”

“A researcher is someone who does research”, the children replied.

“And what does doing research mean?”

“Doing research is wanting to know something, being curious, wanting to answer questions,” they said.

One child remarked that research was what they did at school when they had to write something for the teacher or do a project. As the school encourages the children to work on projects, they are already accustomed to the idea of investigation from an early age.

“And is anyone in the room curious about something that might be interesting to find out?” I inquired, noting that many hands were raised at this point.

“I want to know how cartoons were invented!”

“I want to know how video games are made!”

“I’d like to know why volcanoes erupt!”

“And I’d like to know how they make the food that astronauts eat in space!” were some of the responses that I recorded in my field diary. I chose one of these questions at random, saying that they were all very good ideas, but that I needed only one as an example.

“Let’s imagine that today we want to find out how video games are made. What could we do to find this out?”. As the children came up with ideas, I noted them on the board.

“You could search on the Internet!”

“Or you could go to the library.”

“You could also read books about games.”

“You could ask someone who makes games.”

“You could also interview someone who works at Nintendo or Playstation.”

In this way, we worked out together how we could go about satisfying our curiosity<sup>15</sup>.

After this I told the children that I too, as a researcher, was very curious to know a bit more about children’s lives and their relationships with their grandparents. I asked them if they knew where I could find information on this subject and they were eager to help, telling me that I could consult books, search the Internet, go to the library, ask their parents, their teacher, or their grandparents themselves. In only two classes did a child spontaneously

<sup>15</sup> This dialogue is based on my Field Notes from 22 to 24 March.



respond that I could investigate this with the children themselves. So, I asked another question: “But do you really think that the children’s teacher and parents really know what they do with their grandparents? So who do you think could give me better information on the things they do together, when they see them and what they most like about each other?”. These questions led the children to understand that the people who could help me most were the children themselves and their grandparents. I said that this was true, that both could help me, but that for my study, I was more interested in the point of view of the children. Then they immediately responded: “Then you have to ask us!”. I said that that was precisely why I was there, to see if some of them could help me with my research. I said that they didn’t need to give me an answer right away, that I would be there for several weeks – asking them whether they would let me stay in their class – and that another day I would explain better what we were going to do.



One interesting aspect, which united my curiosity regarding the children with their curiosity towards me, was the fact that the coordinator and the teachers had commented, during my presentation, that I was living in Germany. The children asked me lots of questions about my new country. They were always coming up to me and wanting to know how long I had been living there, how long I would be spending in Brazil, who I lived with, if I had a pet, what my house was like, if I spoke German, how people dressed, what they ate, what the plants and animals were like, and so on. As they were so curious, I thought it might be a good idea to let them get to know me better before I started asking them about their lives. I agreed to bring some photos and to tell them some curious facts about Germany. So, around three or four days after my first contact, we talked about the life and customs of the German people.



Fig. 3: Photographs of Germany shown to the children. Researchers private archive.



I invited them to sit on the floor, in one of the corners of the classroom, and opened a map of the world. I asked if anyone knew where Porto Alegre was and could locate it on the map, marking it with a colored pin. Then I asked another child to locate Germany and Munich. We could see how far away they were from each other, with the whole Atlantic Ocean in the middle and that it would be impossible to drive to my city from theirs by car. I showed them some photos of Germany (shown below) and what excited their curiosity the most was the snow, the long winter nights, typical architecture and the bread with sausages and sauerkraut, which they didn't find very appetizing. They also wanted to learn some words of German, so I used the pictures to teach them to say *Schnee* (snow); *Haus* (house); *Brötchen* (bread roll); *Wurst* (sausage); *Kraut* (sauerkraut); *Hallo* (Hi), *Danke* (thank you), *Bitte* (please) and *Tschüss* (bye), which they attempted to say over and over again to the accompaniment of a great deal of laughter. These words were also incorporated into their everyday routine and they would often say "Hallo" and "Tschüss" instead of "Oi" and "Tchau".

Impressed by the distance between Porto Alegre and Munich on the map, they asked me about this: "How long does it take to get there?". I said it was a long journey, that it had taken me about 14 hours to get to Porto Alegre from there. We worked out how long 14 hours was – all the things that someone can do in that time – and the children were very impressed by this. One of them asked me: "Anne. Did you come all that way just to interview us?". I said yes and they were amazed. They looked at me



Fig. 4: Mafalda (Quino, 2004, p. 420).

in wonder and seemed to begin to understand how important they were for my work. At that point, a child from the 4<sup>th</sup> year, put up his hand and asked:

"But Anne, if you live in Germany, why did you come to do your research here in Brazil?"

"Good question!" I replied. "It's because I'm Brazilian and I'm very interested in the lives of children in Brazil. In Germany, people are also interested in the lives of children in other parts of the world, because the lives of children in Germany, India, China, and Brazil are very different."

"And why in Porto Alegre?" she asked me again.



I started thinking about the relevance of the questions made by this girl, which concerned an important methodological choice regarding the setting of the research.

“Because, when I lived in Brazil, I lived in Porto Alegre. I love this city and my friends and my family live here. Whenever I come to Brazil, I come here. Another reason is that Porto Alegre is a big state capital, as important as other big cities.”

“And why did you choose our school?”, she went on.

“Why this school?”

“An excellent question! Porto Alegre has various schools, it’s true. But, as I used to work here, a few years ago, as a 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year teacher, and as I liked working here a lot, I thought it would be a good idea. Another reason is that there are a lot of children here. I thought that it would be a good place to meet you and ask for your help.”<sup>16</sup>

This was how I started talking to the boys and girls of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years. During the first three weeks, I sat in on the classes at the agreed times, moving from one to the other, providing help for anyone who needed it. I handed out materials, pinned the children’s artwork on the wall, cleared up doubts about tasks, helped out with activities, worked with some of the children when the teacher asked, accompanied some groups in the library. As I wanted to establish interaction with the children (without having much time to do so), I thought that immersion and direct participation in the everyday life of the school would be much more effective than a purely observational or “reactive” approach (Corsaro, 1997b). This more “proactive” approach made my presence in the classroom more comfortable and allowed me to become a familiar figure not only to the children, but also to the adults who appeared in the school, including the children’s parents and grandparents.

I gradually developed a closer relationship with the children, but it did not take long for us to connect. As I was regularly at the school, we would see each other every day and had time to talk and exchange experiences. When they came to talk to me, they usually brought up things that we had in common, such as their last name being German, having visited Germany, having flown in an airplane, knowing my former pupils or having done something with their grandparents. One child came to tell me that her grandmother, who lived in another State, was going to spend a week with her and her family and another showed me a necklace she was wearing, saying: “Did you know it was my grandma who gave me this?”. But it was not only the similarities that brought us together and established our first point of contact. Differences also helped. The children were always curious about my clothes. They looked at the fabric, the cut, the label, the color, the style of my shoes, the

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<sup>16</sup> This dialog is based on my Field Notes taken between 25 and 31 March.



accessories I used, the color of my nails. They were interested in everything and this led them not only to talk to me but also to touch me. Once, when I wore a T-shirt I'd bought in Norway, which had a picture of a reindeer printed on it and something written in Norwegian, one child asked me to translate what was written and asked me, wide-eyed with wonder, "So you live near where Father Christmas lives? Did you go there and buy that T-shirt?". From the fact that they were always calling out "Hi Anne!" in the corridors and the close verbal and physical relationship I had developed with them, I could see that they were building up a certain curiosity and affection towards me.



Fig. 5: Bookmark Alexandre made for me.

Today, I was with Class 41 at story time. The teacher had reserved a room in the library to tell the end of the story that they were reading: *O fantástico mistério de Feiurinha*. When the children arrived, they set about taking multi-colored cushions that were in the left-hand corner of the room and spreading them out on the floor. Some were sitting and others lying down on the carpet. I sat down on the floor, near the children, but at the back, so as not to block their view. The teacher sat down on one of the few chairs and began to read. The children were engrossed in the story. There was no sound in the room except for the teacher's voice. I noticed one of the children very near to me moving slowly and silently, pushing the cushion up against my leg and resting their head on it. I ran my fingers affectionately through their hair and soon another one came and did the same thing. The three of us snuggled together listening to the story without saying a word, but we knew that we were fond of each other<sup>17</sup>.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> year children had quite a difficult morning today. One of their classmates had to change class and lots of them cried about this during the lesson. The teacher agreed to meet the girl in question and her classmates in the school playground so that they could play together a bit. When the girl arrived, sobbing, she hugged her classmates, the teacher, and myself, saying, "I won't see Anne anymore! I wanted so much to be part of the research!". She sat on my lap and I said that I would also be doing the research with the afternoon groups and that there was no need to be upset. She sat on my lap hugging me for several minutes. I was impressed that she seemed to consider losing me, in the midst of losing so many others, the most significant loss<sup>18</sup>.

As the days went by and I grew closer to the children, they started to ask me – and not just the teachers – for other activities. In one 4<sup>th</sup> year class, they asked me to read them a chapter from *Duda*, which they were reading at story time; on another occasion, they asked me whether I could help the teacher to write something on the board, because they wanted to see if my handwriting was nice. On the day when they went to the theater, the children invited me to go along. When, on occasions, I accompanied them at playtime in the playground, I noted that some children sat with me, offered to share their snack with me

<sup>17</sup> Field Notes, March 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Field Notes, March 2010.



and asked me to look after their toys and coats. At times they gave me presents, such as drawings and objects they had made.<sup>19</sup> At Easter, I handed out lollipops and they gave me chocolates and Easter eggs. One girl even included me in a story she had written that was set in Germany:

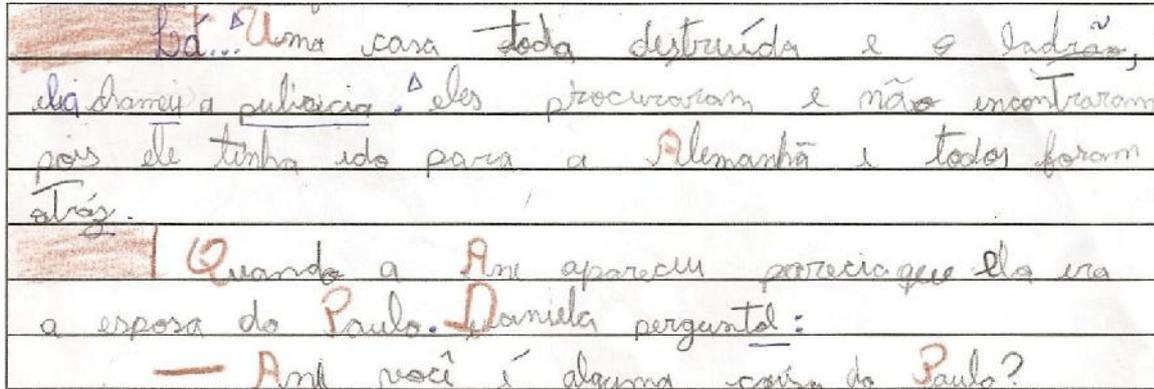


Fig. 6: Excerpt from story written in class by Nycolle.

I believe that forging ties is a fundamental part of conducting research with children. This is why I spent most of the three weeks I had interacting with them on a daily basis. If a researcher fails to build up a good relation with the children, it will be difficult to *gain their permission* to go into the details of their everyday lives. Contact and conversation can be built up

gradually, allowing time to establish “an interpersonal point of contact that provides the narrator and the researcher a chance to become fond of one another” (Errante, 2000, p.154). This bridge, as Errante puts it, should be built together, in such a way that a feedback relationship is developed that fosters “trust, respect and legitimacy, as memories are elicited, tales are told, and the acts of listening and investigation are developed” (Errante, 2000, p.153).



Fig. 7: Drawing Nycolle gave me.



Fig. 8: Easter card from Alice.

In this process of forming ties, I also tried to adopt an

<sup>19</sup> The drawings reproduced here are examples of presents I received from the children.



attitude different from that frequently employed by adults in relating to children. Although I helped them at school, I did not try to control their activities or their behavior. I was a researcher, who could help, because helping is what people, adults and children alike, do for each other every day. So, when it came to questions such as “Can I go to the bathroom?”, “Can I go to the nurse?”, “Can I drink some water?”, “Can I write this down?” it was always the teacher who responded. I was trying to build up, in the field, the image of an *atypical adult* (Corsaro, 2003): an adult who is neither teacher, coordinator, psychologist, or teaching assistant, but an adult who is there only to observe, to get to know them, which was something that seemed new and strange to them.



Fig. 9: Drawing given to me by Aline, where she draws me.

It became clear that I had achieved this position when I started to notice that my presence did not get in the way of the children’s play and classroom activities. When alone, they did not stop playing, running, or shouting when I arrived or was with them. The teacher had to come back to re-establish order. They often invited me to talk and showed me the toys (*cyberbots* and *galactics*) that they played with in their free time at school. Although they knew that I had once been a teacher, they always called me “Anne”. This didn’t mean that they didn’t identify me as an adult, but that they saw me as an adult different from others.



Fig. 10: Drawing given to me by Gabriela.

One day, coming out of class 43, I met Amanda coming back from the library. When she was at the door, she greeted me and said, “I think I’ll get some water before I go in, because I’ve just remembered that my bottle is almost empty”. We began to walk together along the corridor towards the drinking fountain and the staff room, which was nearby. Suddenly she gave me her hand and began to swing her arm as she told me something about her day. As we talked, she began to swing her arm faster and then walk at a faster pace. I realized we had walked the length of the corridor almost running and were both laughing and out of breath when we reached the drinking fountain.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Field Notes, May 2010.



This little game brought home to me the extent to which we had established a relationship that was spontaneous and not bound by the rules that normally pertain between adults and children. Amanda was not only inviting me to run with her – which could have happened at any time in any place –, she was doing something with me that is normally reprimanded by adults. “Don’t run in the corridor!” was not only a phrase that I heard countless times when I was with the children in the field, but one that I had uttered myself when I worked as a teacher. In spite of all of this, we ran together.

The fact of me no longer being a child did not prevent me from participating – albeit

in a limited fashion – in some of the situations that occurred in their peer culture.

I was an adult but I did not appear to inhabit an entirely different world distant from theirs. In the note Betina gave me (Fig. 11),

for example, she highlights the things that we both supposedly have in common: we are

“supposedly” affectionate, cheerful and the like. Something similar appears in the

drawing reproduced below (Fig.12), which

Kátia gave me as a present during our last research meeting. It can be seen that the two

of us are depicted as being very similar: the same hair-do, the same hair-color, the same

physique, the same pose, and the same clothes: a long-sleeved sweat shirt, pants,

shoes and a scarf. The only thing that

differentiates us is our height: a marker of my status as an adult and hers as a child.

I assumed this position of an *atypical adult* in a very special and intensive way during

the recess, when I was alone with three girls participating in the research. As we had done

the interview in the third period (during which normally the children have snack in the

classroom), it was raining slightly and we still hadn’t had our snack; they asked me if I could

get the key to the classroom from the teacher so they could eat there. The four of us stayed

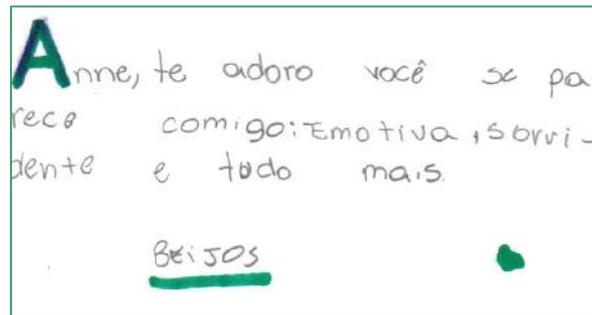


Fig. 11: Note Betina gave me.



Fig. 12: Drawing Kátia gave me.

get the key to the classroom from the teacher so they could eat there. The four of us stayed



in the classroom. While they ate, I made some notes in my Field Diary. When they had finished their snacks, they started to play:

Catarina was the first to get up and encourage her schoolmates to play tag. Suddenly they began to run around the hall, moving from class to class. I remained where I was writing, but alert to what was going on. Both they and I were aware that they were not allowed to run in the classroom. A bit later, Érica picked up a ruler and said that it was a magic wand and that anyone she touched with it would be turned into a statue. "Tag" had become "stick", as the children themselves called it. With the appearance of the 30cm ruler, the game started to liven up, because it was now easy to touch the others. Amidst the shouting and the bounding about of the girls trying to escape the magic wand for fear of being 'stuck', another girl from the same class walked past in the corridor, heard the commotion, opened the door and decided to join in. Now there were four girls in the room and it was beginning to get a bit too small for them. Then I heard Adriana cry out, "Anne gives you protection!" I, who had not played tag for a long time, had not understood what part I would play in the game. But I soon perceived that, when someone was in danger, they would run in my direction and throw themselves at me, grabbing my clothes to protect themselves from the spells cast by the magic wand. I was included in the game without needing to run or to speak. I was a "place" in the game and it was now fun to run to me. Suddenly, we heard the bell. Recess was over. They continued to run about, but as they played, kept going to the door to see if the teacher was coming with the rest of the class. Suddenly we heard voices in the corridor. Adriana ran to the door, looked out, looked at each of us and said looking at me: "The game's over! Teacher's arrived!". At that point, I understood that I truly was in a unique position. I was not prohibiting the game. On the contrary, I could join in.<sup>21</sup>

"It was then that the fox appeared.

"Good morning," said the fox.

"Good morning," the little prince responded politely, although when he turned around he saw nothing.

"I am right here," the voice said, "under the apple tree."

"Who are you?" asked the little prince, and added, "You are very pretty to look at."

"I am a fox," the fox said.

"Come and play with me," proposed the little prince. "I am so unhappy."

"I cannot play with you," the fox said. "I am not tamed." . . .

"What must I do, to tame you?" asked the little prince.

"You must be very patient," replied the fox.

"First you will sit down at a little distance from me—like that—in the grass. I shall look at you out of the corner of my eye, and you will say nothing. Words are the source of misunderstandings. But you will sit a little closer to me, every day . . ."

(Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, Chapter XXI, 1981)

<sup>21</sup> Field Notes, April 2010.



### 1.4.3 Establishing the Groups to be Interviewed: the selection process

One of the basic criteria for my study was the composition of the child's family. As I wanted to examine relations between grandparents and grandchildren in single-parent families, reconstituted families, nuclear and extended families, I needed to get to know more about the structure of the children's families, which was information that the school was unable to provide me with. They only had these data for children referred to special services. As it was still the beginning of the school year and the teachers had not yet talked to the parents of their charges, they too were unaware of the family structures of the children. Therefore, I myself had to conduct a survey about family constellations so as to be able to organize my methodology better and put together the groups to be interviewed.

At the start of my second week in the field, the children and I filled in a questionnaire with basic data on the people they lived with (Appendix 4). I applied this survey to all children in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years, telling them that this was still not the research proper, but a way of getting to know them better. I surveyed 153 children in all and using the results calculated how many children lived in nuclear families (94), single-parent families (23), reconstituted families (11) and extended families (19 with their grandparents and 6 with other relatives), noting the total number of children for each family group in each class. I had still not explained to the children how they would be interviewed; so, I did not know how they would react to this or how receptive they would be. So, my next step was to explain to them the methods I would use, as a way of finding out how many children, from which family groups, would be interested in taking part. I explained:

- 1) That the research was for a doctoral thesis that I was writing in Brazil and in Germany and that what we talked about would be the empirical data for my research, which would be published in a kind of book called a thesis. I drew on the board to explain what a doctorate is. Many of them already knew because they had parents who had Masters and Doctorates. I also took them my Master's Dissertation as an example, so that they could see how their drawings and comments would be used.
- 2) That the study was important, not only for me, but also for all researchers, who, like me, were interested in the subject. I reminded them of the day they had told me that I could satisfy my curiosity by consulting books and I commented that many of these



books were the result of research like that which I we were going to do. I took a book in German (*Geschichte der Großelternrollen*) and another in French (*Le siècle des grands-parents*), that have pictures of grandparents and grandchildren on the cover and I remarked that when we do research, we can't tell how many people – or from what countries – might be interested in what we have written.

- 3) That the interviews would not be one-to-one, but in threes, and that there was no need to be embarrassed about talking to me because other children would be with them. This was an important aspect of the methodology and was adopted because children often feel uncomfortable and shy when they are alone with the researcher. Researchers need to be aware that children are not used to being interviewed or to talk about what they know to adults in a context different from that of the school room. Children are rarely called upon to teach us things about their lives. For this reason, as suggested by Graue and Walsh (2003), peer support can make the climate more relaxed and familiar, helping the conversation to flow.
- 4) That we would meet once a week, for six weeks, always on the same day at the same time and that each meeting would last about 40 minutes. I had reserved a period of time (50 minutes) with the teachers, because I needed to take the children out of class to the interview room and come back with them when the meeting was over and my room was in a different block from that where the children had classes. I opted for short interviews for a number of reasons. First, because the children couldn't spend too much time out of class, as this would make it more difficult for them to catch up on what they had missed, which would be detrimental both to the teacher and the children. Furthermore, parents might not agree with their son or daughter being absent from class for prolonged periods. As the school day is divided into 50 minute periods, I thought that it would be easier to manage the time of the interviews using the same time period. Finally, one of the most important reasons was the need to ensure effective participation on the part of the children. Very long interviews can tire them out and dampen their enthusiasm for the activity.
- 5) That, although we would be meeting six times, we would be doing different things during each meeting and that I would be using a voice-recorder so that I could listen again to what had been said during the interview. I explained that, during our



meetings, we would be talking, making collages, drawing and taking photographs but that they wouldn't be able to take the work they produced home, because I would need it for the thesis.<sup>22</sup> I also explained that all the materials used during the meetings (paper, glue, scissors, rubbers, lead and colored pencils, crayons, pens and so forth) would be provided by me and that they would not have to pay for them, as required by Brazilian law according to Federal Resolution nº 196/1996 on research involving human beings.

- 6) That we would be in a separate room<sup>23</sup> and that, while they were with me, the teacher would continue teaching the class to those of their colleagues who were not taking part. However, there was no need to worry about this, because the teacher and I had agreed that the interviews would not coincide with special classes (such as Physical Education, Music or Computing) nor with any tests or the introduction of new content. When I explained this, the teachers backed me up, in order to reassure the children. I also said that I would promise to go back to their classes with them and help them to copy from the board or from a colleague anything they had missed. As I was accompanying the children on a day to day basis in the classroom, I had a good idea of what they were working on. On the other hand, the children also understood that I could help them when I brought them back from the interviews, because they had seen me helping them every day. This was a promise I made to the parents, teachers, and, above all, the children. Were they to go back to class without me, the teacher would have a heavier workload, because she would have to go back over what had been done; the parents would be concerned that their child was being absent from class for prolonged periods and miss the contents of the class and may have refused to permit their children to take part in the research for this reason; the children would be harmed, because they would not only fall behind their peers, but would also have to organize their notebooks, papers and books alone, and would therefore get nothing in return for the time they spent on the research. The children and I agreed that they would help me with my work and I would help them with theirs. For this reason, when I worked out the timetable for the interviews, I always

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<sup>22</sup> I will explain my reasons for this later, when I deal with the methods developed for each meeting.

<sup>23</sup> The school allowed me to use the Social Studies laboratory. It was a small room, overlooking the playground, with some rectangular tables, stools and a long shelf for storing teaching materials.



set aside a free period (or two, depending on the specific features of each group), so that the interviews were spaced out by time during which I could help the children catch up on their schoolwork<sup>24</sup>.

**Table 2**  
Interview Timetable and Help Times

Morning					
Periods:	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1 <sup>o</sup> - 7:30 – 8:20		Class 41 Group 1	Class 31 Group 2		
2 <sup>o</sup> - 8:20 – 9:10		Help time C 41 – G1	Help time C31 – G2		
3 <sup>o</sup> - 9:10 – 10:00		Class 31 Group 1	Class 41 Group 2		
Recess					
4 <sup>o</sup> - 10:20 – 11:10		Help time C 31 – G1	Help time C 41 – G2		
5 <sup>o</sup> - 11:10 – 12:00		Help time C 31 – G1	Help time C31 – G2		

Afternoon					
Periods:	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1 <sup>o</sup> - 13:10 – 14:00	Class 32 Group 1		Class 42 Group 1	Class 33 Group 2	
2 <sup>o</sup> - 14:00 – 14:50	Help time C 32 – G1	Class 32 Group 2	Help time C 42 – G1		
3 <sup>o</sup> - 14:50 – 15:40	Class 33 Group 1	Help time C 32 – G2	Class 43 Group 2	Help time C 33 – G2	
Recess					
4 <sup>o</sup> - 16:00 – 16:50	Help time C 33 – G1	Class 43 Group 1	Help time C 43 – G2	Class 42 Group 2	
5 <sup>o</sup> - 16:50 – 17:30	Help time C 32 – G1	Help time C 43 – G1	Help time C 43 – G2	Help time C 42 – G2	

- 7) That as I was only a researcher and would be in Brazil only for a short period of time. For this reason, I had agreed with the teachers that I would interview six children from each class (two groups of three children) and that, following day, we would select the children according to those who were willing to participate.
- 8) That the parents' permission was also required for the children to participate in the research.

<sup>24</sup> On Mondays and Fridays, I prepared the materials that we would use during the meetings. I continued to go to the school on Thursday mornings to be with the children, even though there were no interviews. This free day allowed room for any timetable changes. Likewise, Friday afternoons were used to make up for holidays and make changes with teachers, if necessary.



After clarifying these points and responding to all the children's queries, I asked them who would like to take part, marking an "x" against their names on the register. We agreed that I would select the participants by lot in the coming days. From the survey of the six classes, I could see that many children were willing to take part, which made it possible to form two distinct family groups per class. As I had six classes, this meant that I would have twelve groups of children in all, distributed across the various previously established family constellations, resulting in three groups of children for each family grouping. As the numbers of children per family group wanting to participate varied from group to group as did the profile of the six classes, I chose two family groups per class, so as to obtain a homogeneous sample: three groups of children with nuclear families (9 children), three groups of children from single-parent families (9 children), three groups of children from reconstituted families (9 children) and three groups of children from families that lived with their grandparents (9 children), resulting in a total of 36 children interviewed. Sixteen boys and twenty girls were chosen by lot.

On the day the children were chosen by lot, I explained to them that it was very important for my study to interview boys and girls who lived in different kinds of families and that, based on the questionnaire they had filled in with me, I had divided their names into four envelopes, according to their family structure. As each class could only have two groups of children, I explained that I would need to choose only two envelopes for and that I would draw the envelopes and the names randomly. I made a point of drawing the lots in the children's presence, because I wanted them to see that I had not chosen any of the children in advance. Thus, no child who genuinely wanted to participate in the interview was left out of the draw, including children attending special services.

The selection was not an easy process. The children were anxious about it and kept coming up to me in the corridor and asking me when we were going to draw the lots. Before beginning to take the names out of the envelope, in the third week, I noticed that many children were crossing their fingers and bowing their heads in concentration. Each name drawn was a source of joy for some and sorrow for others. Various children cried when their names were not drawn, which upset me, but unfortunately there was no other way to do it. On the other hand, those whose names were drawn were ecstatic and when I asked them whether they really wanted to take part, they said things like, "Of course! Of course! Of



course! How could you think not?" (André) or "It's like I just won *Big Brother!!!*" (Alexandre), demonstrating the enormous significance that this had taken on for them. The mother of one of the children whose name was chosen came up to me in the playground and said that her daughter had arrived home saying that she really was a very lucky girl for having had her name selected. She told me that her daughter had been willing her name to be selected while the lots were being drawn and that she was certain that this had helped, because those of her friends who had been saying "My name's not going to be drawn!" or "I never have any good luck!" were in fact not selected. She told me that her daughter had arrived home with the research envelope in her hands as if it were a piece of treasure, a true prize.

After the draw, I quickly took the children out of the class and gave each of them an envelope containing my *Letter of Introduction* and the *Terms of Informed Parental Consent* (Appendix 5), explaining to the children what this was and asking them to bring it back to me as soon as possible, so that we would have time to draw new names if parents or guardians refused to let them take part. I was quite worried about obtaining the parents' permission. The school coordinator had warned me that some of them might resist the idea, since she had been trying for two weeks to get fifteen children to take part in another research project involving only two meetings and had only managed to get permission for eight pupils from the whole of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years. This left me anxious, since I had planned six meetings and wanted to try to work with an equal number of children from each type of family. However, the envelopes were returned swiftly and all the parents gave their permission. I believe that this success rate was directly related to the relationship I had established with the children themselves. They were the ones who first wanted and agreed to take part in the research meetings and transmitted this wish to their parents, as can be seen from the example cited above where the child's mother remarked on how happy her daughter was to arrive home with the envelope in her hands. One boy who was selected told me: "My mum told me that I could take part in another research project, but I didn't want to; I told her that I really wanted to take part in yours, but, that if I wasn't selected, I'd take part in the other one" (Leonardo). Érica, who was also selected, told me during our first meeting: "I didn't believe I was going to be selected, my heart was beating fast".

The fact that I was at the school on a daily basis also helped. Many of the parents and grandparents met me when they came to drop off or pick up their children and



grandchildren and, on countless such occasions, I heard the children whispering that I was the researcher from Germany. Another crucial factor was the ethical commitment I had with the children to help them following the interview, which reassured their families. Only one parent came to talk to me, but many children remarked in the first interview that they had made this clear to their parents, saying that I was always helping them. I had gained the trust of the children and they were demonstrating this. The teachers too were reassured in that they were aware and in agreement with everything that I was doing. In my view, the negotiations were successful because everyone involved participated and care was taken to deal with both teachers and children in an ethical manner.

However, there can be no doubt that those who were not selected took it badly. I had to talk in private with various children who were upset that they could not participate. One day, shortly after the lots were drawn, I talked to two children in the schoolyard, while I was waiting for a member of the school staff to arrive:

I was sitting on an orange bench, watching the children moving around in the playground. As I watched, I noticed that Nanda and Isabela were coming towards me. They needed to talk to the same member of staff and so decided to wait with me. Nanda [who was selected] started playing with my necklace, sat on my lap, hugged me tight, and kissed me. She told me that she liked my perfume. Isabela stood beside me, a bit stiffly, and with a sad expression she told me that she really was a very unlucky girl. I asked her why and she told me: "I really wanted to be selected, but I wasn't. I really wanted you to draw my name out, but you didn't. Then, I was really hoping that one of the mums and dads wouldn't let one of the children participate, so that you would come back into the classroom and draw some more names and I would have another chance. But all of them ended up accepting..."<sup>25</sup>.

I spent a few days wondering how I could make up for the frustration of these children, who understood that the selection had to be made, but, nonetheless, were saddened by it. So, I decided to arrange an activity exclusively for these children (Appendix 6). Instead of using a simple photocopied activity (in part because there might have been a lot of children), I decided to use colored sheets of paper, cut and decorated in different ways, as can be seen in the illustrations below. And, in spite of the fact that this was an extra activity they would have to do, many boys and girls agreed to do it, so that they could take part in some way in my research<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Field Notes, April 2010.

<sup>26</sup> When material produced by this group of children is used in this thesis, their names are followed by an asterisk, to differentiate them from the others.

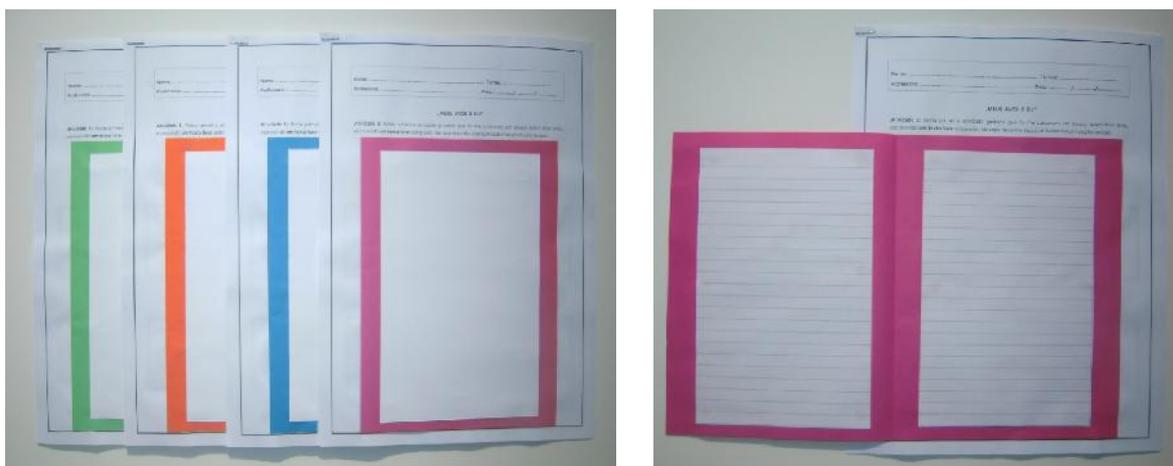


Fig. 13: Examples of materials given to children who were not selected.

The list below arranges the selected children by family group. Although they are included in these groups, there are some – such as those whose parents have joint custody – who straddle more than one category and others that belong to different family configurations, as can be seen from the remarks in parentheses:

**Table 3**  
Children selected by age and family group

Nuclear families		Single-parent families	
Names	Ages	Names	Ages
Betina	9 years old	Baiano (also reconstituted)	10 years old
Kátia	9 years old	Lion (also reconstituted)	8 years old
Catarina	9 years old	Amanda	9 years old
Érica	8 years old	Melissa (also three-generation)	10 years old
Adriana	8 years old	Alexandra	8 years old
João	9 years old	Pedro	8 years old
Alexandre	10 years old	Maria	7 years old
Luca	10 years old	Nanda	8 years old
Alex	8 years old	Leonardo (also three-generation)	8 years old
Reconstituted families		Three-generation families	
Names	Ages	Names	Ages
Carol (also three-generation)	9 years old	Nycolle	8 years old
Gabriella	8 years old	José	8 years old
Felipe	9 years old	Fernanda	9 years old
Lucas	9 years old	Ashley	9 years old
Diego (also single-parent)	9 years old	Fernando	10 years old
Yasmin	8 years old	Jaqueline	10 years old
Daniele (also single-parent)	8 years old	Alice	10 years old
André	8 years old	Natasha	9 years old
Luck (also three-generation)	9 years old	Marcelo	8 years old



#### 1.4.4 Planning and Conducting the Interviews

The use of a mixture of interview techniques, reflecting the multiple languages of children, has been recommended by various authors (Graue & Walsh, 2003; O’Kane, 2008; Scott, 2008) as a way of including children in research projects. Although children are able to participate in oral interviews, too much speaking rapidly tires them out and the activity soon loses its appeal. O’Kane (2008) has shown that activities that involve “more active communication”, mixing speaking with drawing and more physical activities, tend to be performed with more enthusiasm by children, and children themselves identify these as an important factor in maintaining their interest in participating in research meetings.

James et al. (2007) also point out that the shift from *talk-centered* to *task-centered activities* allows children to have access to more varied forms of communication, working on different skills and enabling them to express themselves in various ways. One should be alert to the fact that, while some children express themselves better by talking, others prefer to draw, cut and paste, paint, or write, and a broader range of intervention strategies can help them with this process, making the meeting less predictable and less monotonous. Letting the children “have a say” does not mean only listening to them speak, but also working with different languages – the “hundred languages, hundred hands, hundred thoughts, hundred ways of thinking, playing, and speaking...”, to quote Malaguzzi (1995, p.9) – that children possess. Graue and Walsh (2003) remind us that a good record of data contains information gathered from different perspectives and in different ways and that observation can be carried out from various different angles – the so-called *triangulation principle* – allowing us to build up a fuller description and understanding of our object of study.

“Active communication” strategies that can be used during research activities with children include the use of cultural artifacts such as photographs, reproductions of art works, magazines, songs, films, cartoons, and the children’s own drawings. The latter provides the child with the greatest freedom of expression, in so far as he or she can imagine, tell and retell a story while drawing, omitting and including information during the creative process. However, it is important that the use of such artifacts always be accompanied by the ideas and intentions of the child. It is the child that should tell the story, be it a cartoon, a film, a story, allowing relations to be established between the “written”, the “seen”, the “heard”, and the “said”. Monique Brière points out that “if the child doesn’t



tell us what his or her image means, we do not necessarily understand the message. We may see just a house, a tree, the sun, without understanding what this house means to the child” (Brière in Pillar, 1994, p.10). This is why the graphic expression of children needs to be set in context. As Sarmiento (2007) puts it, both the drawing and the talk of children need to be seen as jointly constituting the child’s form of self-expression, which does not follow the same logic and the same rules as adult self-expression.

It is important to analyze drawing by articulating the different angles that make it up. First of all, it is an act performed by a unique subject – the child who drew it – who has mastered his or her knowledge, desires, experiences, feelings, technical abilities and motor-coordination skills to express themselves on paper or some other medium. This child is also an historical and social subject, embedded in a certain local context, which may encourage or stifle visual self-expression and also guide the “taste” of the child towards certain preferred subjects and cultural artifacts that express the rules and values of the culture in which the child lives. A third feature is that children’s drawing is determined by a generational form of expression, since it differs from that of adults and needs to read according to the interpretative grammar of child cultures (Sarmiento, 2006).

During the creative process, the exchange of ideas is a recurrent feature among children. They do not prohibit the copying of details, colors and shapes; this practice is not only tolerated, but encouraged, when they produce art work. The interactivity of children promotes, in their peer culture, the creation of “collective author” (Sarmiento, 2006) and, thus, throughout the pages of this thesis, we shall see common features in the work, such as the images reproduced below, created by two girls from the same interview group. We can



Fig. 14: Catarina’s drawing [2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting].



Fig. 15: Érica’s drawing [2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting].



see how the children interact to create similar or even identical forms. Both girls drew a sun with a smiley face in one corner of the page with a series of larger and smaller rays, clouds, birds in the sky, a tree with a drawing on the trunk, fruit on the branches, grass and flowers. All these symbols also follow more or less the same mode of representation in their drawings. In the dialogue cited below, between Alexandra, Maria and Natasha, we can also see how this is negotiated:

Maria – I don't know how to draw a tree! I don't know how to do it any other way!

Alexandra – Copy mine! I can do it! I'll do it for you!

Maria – OK, but...

Alexandra – [Looking at the researcher] I only want to teach her how to draw trees because she loved mine. It's like this: you do this and then you draw a little arm. And then you do this, and this, and this...

Maria – I can draw these trees too!

Alexandra – And finally you do this...

Maria – OK, I'll try!

[Maria begins to draw a tree]

Alexandra – That's not it, Maria! Don't draw a finger! Come here and go back a bit...

Clearly in addition to local, individual and generational features, children's drawings also bear traits of the *global culture*, that they are exposed to in the mass media and through the consumer and entertainment industries – *kinderculture* (Steinberg, 1997) –, aimed specifically at them. Likewise, *school culture* leaves its mark on children's drawings, in so far as it operationalizes and structures certain rules of creation, such as representing each component separately along a single axis and using the whole page. Thus, when we investigate the experience of the language of drawing, "we are invited to rethink what we know, to go beyond the expected stages of child development, paying attention to where the children's visual thinking takes them" (Martins, 2007, p.153).

Children's drawings also differ and are valued differently by the children as they grow. One thing that children learn to do over time is to represent objects in space, trying to draw them in a more realistic fashion. Concern about this may leave them dissatisfied with their work, since they do not always live up to their own expectations. As they are building up notions of perspective and depth – having recourse to transparency (drawing something that can't be seen, even though they know it exists) and organizing objects around a central axis (Luquet, 1969; Meredieu, 1974) – the real imagined object often clashes with the object as they have represented it:



Fernando – I’m going to draw my great aunt the best I can... *I don’t know how to do her hair very well!*

Pedro – *I don’t know how to paint a smile.* That’s awful! My God! She looks like a witch!

Yasmin – *I can’t draw old people!* The problem is that my grandma doesn’t look old in this drawing!

Érica – I drew my grandmother, but she isn’t as skinny as that. She’s fatter.

Researcher – So why did you draw her thinner?

Érica – *Because I don’t know how to draw her fat.*

Melissa – Is that good?

Researcher – Yes!

Melissa – *But it doesn’t look like my grandmother!*

Drawing stimulates the emotions, imagination, memory and powers of observation of children and is connected to their everyday lives and concrete experiences. The production of drawings also depends on social conditions – where the drawing is being produced, the time available, the nature of the task (free or guided) –, the people involved in the process, and the materials provided (paper, canvas, pencils, paint, brushes and so forth). According to Vygotsky (1988), as children draw, they think about the object in their imagination, as if they were talking about it. This is why the graphic self-



Fig. 16: Example of transparency: José drew what is happening inside his house, without the walls.

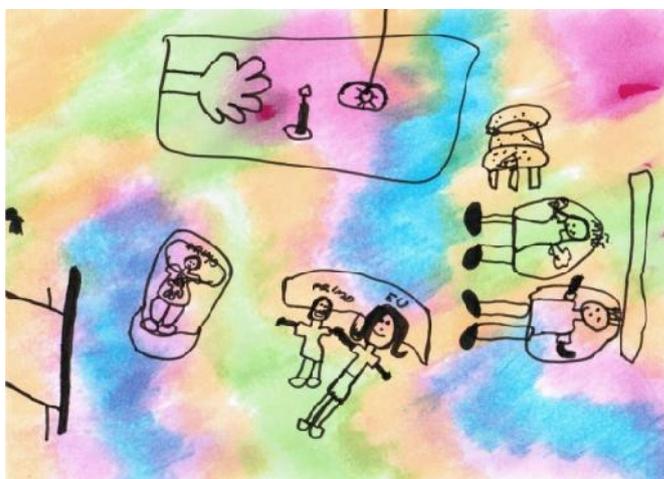


Fig. 17: Nanda’s drawing shows the inside of her house seen from above.

expression of children is often accompanied by verbal self-expression (they tell the story of what they are drawing) and why they do not always draw what they can see, but also what they know exists, depicting the features of the object represented that they



deem to be more important. As a symbolic form of production, children's drawing expresses ways of interpreting the world; and it is thus an act of communication and not just a simple representation of external reality, as we shall see in the coming chapters. As Sarmiento (2006) puts it,

[...] each drawing is the fruit of an individual act of subjective creation, in a certain place at a certain time; and it is thus unique and impossible to repeat, because it is the result of a singular opportunity for symbolic articulation of a variety of codes and lexical items arranged graphically according to the creative interpretation of the child (Sarmiento, 2006, p.227).

The activities I planned for this study started out from precisely this assumption that there is "active communication" that privileges the use of multiple and varied resources. However, I was also concerned to include a new variable in my methodology: I wanted the children to do things differently from the way they normally do in the classroom. As James et al. (2007) remark, "through their schooling, in industrialized societies at least, children are accustomed to paint and draw and are actively encouraged to express themselves on paper" (p.189). However, though this skill is a positive aspect of the use of drawings, their use may also be somewhat unappealing and non-stimulating, since it is something that is no different from what they do with the teacher in class. So, I decided to work with different drawing techniques, which would allow the children to enjoy trying out new textures and colors.

However, I also had to consider the time available for each meeting. Were the children to develop the new drawing techniques together with me, taking part in all the stages in its preparation, it would be unlikely there would be time for any actual drawing, let alone discussion and explanation. So, even though it was a quite laborious process, I prepared all the materials in advance, so that we could make the most of our time together. The children noticed how dedicated I was to them, as the dialogue below shows:

Catarina – Oh, that's lovely! [the colored sheet] That must have taken you a long time to do?

Adriana – Mustn't it, and there's all these too!

Érica – Poor Anne! How did you manage to do all this?

Catarina – It looks great!

Adriana – It is, Anne. Thank you so much! [2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting]

They were very curious to know what I had planned for the next meeting. And, as they were interviewed on different days, they would communicate among themselves, telling each other what would be done that day:



Alice – Anne, what are we going to do in the next meeting?

Researcher – Oh, I can't tell! It's a surprise!!!

Alice – OK. If you won't tell me, we'll get Amanda or Lucas to tell us. I really want to know! So I'll ask them...

Melissa – I won't ask, so as not to spoil the surprise... but I'm curious to know! [4<sup>th</sup> Meeting]

The use of these techniques also gave aesthetic importance to the children's work, since they would be unlikely to have time to color their drawings during the meetings, and many children like drawing but not necessarily coloring in, as Alexandre put it when I gave him one of my pre-prepared sheets: "Wow! Great! I like drawing, but I don't much like coloring in!".

When planning my intervention in the field, I decided to hold six meetings on different subjects, so as to gain access to the various angles on the relations between grandparents and grandchildren. I chose the topics for each meeting based on my own reading and reflection over the years. I designed the methods much as I would design lessons, in so far as I was deliberately deciding the course I would adopt in the field. The first thing I did was to outline my own basic aims for each topic: "What do I wish to achieve in this meeting?"; "What do I want to find out through this topic?". On this basis, I planned my strategies for working with the children, trying to establishing methodological working guidelines, which I outline below, as they were designed and according to what actually happened in the field. As the interviews were made up of different sections and not "simple" question and answer sessions, I feel the need to describe them in the main body of the thesis, so that the analysis undertaken in the following chapters can be understood in context and in the light of the children own words.

## *Interview 1*

- **Topic:** When does someone become a grandparent? Markers and meanings attributed by the children.
- **Aims:** To approach the subject of "grandparents" in general terms, without dealing specifically with the children's own grandparents – although the children could obviously use their own concrete experiences to talk about the subject – in order to find out what they understand this generational position to be. How do children conceptualize "being a grandfather" and "being a grandmother"? Do they connect



this role to family generations or to age? What are the identity markers used by the children to describe them?

### Activity 1: An ET arrives on Planet Earth

The children were sitting on one side of a large rectangular table and me on the other facing them. I began the activity by asking them if they could tell me what an ET is. They gave me a puzzled look; because they knew we were there to talk about grandparents. However, they soon began to explain:

Alice – It's someone, not really a person, who lives on another planet. And everyone says they're green.

Felipe – I've seen one on TV. He sees people as little squares.

Lucas – Like in *Alien versus Predator*; he sees people by color.

Fernando – It's a kind of animal with reptile skin that comes from another planet.

Fernanda – It's someone dressed up.

André – It's an animal from another planet that has three eyes, antennae, and four feet and eats carrots.

Leonardo – Like in that film with the ET whose finger shines!

João – He lives in another galaxy.

Alexandre – Or in another universe, if such a thing exists!

Lucas – They write different and are very smart.

Betina – It's an extraterrestrial! An Avatar! And if they did exist, they would already have dominated the Earth, because they want to be the kings of the Planet!

Kátia – I've seen various videos and sites that say they are afraid of human beings!

Pedro – Someone who came from Mars. A weird thing!

Alexandra – An animal of another species that we don't know.

José – An alien that came from space!

Lion – I collect the UFO magazine. I'm a fan of them! I've always believed in them!

I continued the conversation by asking the children whether they thought that ETs, even though they live on another planet, speak the same language as we do:

Jaqueline – I think they speak a different language, because they live on a different planet.

Maria – I think they speak like this: "lhoulhoulhoulhoulhoulhou"!

Kátia – I'm not even sure they speak!

Fernanda – They speak all funny!

Alexandra – I think they speak another kind of language, like dogs and cats, because they live on another planet and human beings speak one language and animals speak another. Especially ETs, because they're a kind of animal we don't know. I think most of them speak another language... There may be ETs that speak our language, but no-one's seen one.

Pedro – But, just because they don't live on our planet, doesn't mean they don't speak our language... we don't know...

Luca – They could speak another language that makes no sense. Like this: they could say 'dog' and mean 'egg'.



At this point I said: “Then it happened that an ET has arrived on Earth...”. I showed the children a model of an ET and pretended he was flying and landing his spaceship in: “...Porto Alegre!”, the children cried out. When I showed them the ET, they normally demonstrated their appreciation for the material I had prepared for them:

Amanda – It’s pretty! So pretty!  
 Betina – Ohhhhhhhhhhhh... It’s so pretty!  
 Kátia – And he even came in a spaceship!  
 Érica – Look at it! How wonderful!

And they actively participated in the story I was telling:

Betina – Does this spaceship have air-conditioning?  
 Lion – What’s his planet called?



Fig. 18: The ET’s drawing that I showed to the children.

I continued the story: “So the ET landed his spaceship here in our city, on a grassy area near a park, and he started to walk and walk and walk, thinking that everything was very strange and weird...”. Then Lucas, noting that there was important detail missing, asked me:

- How many legs does he have?  
 - Four! – I replied. Looking at him carefully, and I went on: - He was walking, looking at everything, very puzzled, very scared, when suddenly he came upon a house.

At this point, I showed a drawing of a house to the children and they cried out:

Catarina – Grandma’s house?  
 Nanda – But he wouldn’t know it is a house, because everything on his planet is blue!  
 Baiano – I would like to live there!  
 Carol – Cool!  
 Amanda – How lovely! You can even see the shadows of the people!  
 Gabriella – The shadows! He was behind there, so he could only see the shadow!  
 Érica – Look at the shadow! It’s really nicely done! Really nice!



Fig. 19: The house’s drawing that I showed to the children.



Then I asked: “- Like you, the ET also realized that there were people moving about in the house and that he could see the shadows of two people in the window. Who do you think they are?”

Amanda – A grandfather and a grandchild.

Adriana – A grandmother and a grandchild.

Lucas – A father and a son.

Amanda – A brother and a sister.

Érica – A mother and a child.

Leonardo – A child and an adult, obviously! Because one is big and the other is small!

Nycolle – Yes, but I’m big!

Marcelo – My mother’s about the same size as me!

Alice – Or a teenager and a child, because teenagers are tall!

The story went on: “- He too didn’t know who those people were, but he could hear a muffled conversation coming from inside the house. So he drew closer and closer and closer until he could make out a sentence”:

Blablablablalabla – went some children.

Rourouoruroruroru – went others.

Nhaúnhaúnhaúnhaú – called out a third group, showing how the ET would understand the conversation.



Fig. 20: This image shows how Alice placed the figures spontaneously when I told them that the ET was approaching the house.

- The sentence was: “Grandma, will you take me to buy an ice cream?” I said.

- Ah, so it must be a grandmother and a child, although we don’t know if it’s a boy or a girl! – Amanda argued.



- But, as you said, the ET didn't speak our language. In fact, he could make out a bit of Portuguese, like you can understand some English in classes, yes? But he couldn't understand much. When he heard this phrase, he couldn't understand two of the words.

- The Da Vinci Code! – Baiano exclaimed, to demonstrate that this was a mystery.

I asked the children if they could tell me which words these were and all the groups immediately replied “grandma” and “ice cream”, and gave their reasons:

Fernanda – Because they're the only two things the ET couldn't know!

Fernando – Yes, because they don't have grandmas or ice cream!

Nycolle – Because he's in Porto Alegre and on his planet they don't have these.

Leonardo – And how would he find out about ice cream? He'd have to use another name, wouldn't he?

Betina – His ice cream is probably made of worms!

I continued the activity, asking the children to imagine that the ET had never seen a grandmother nor an ice cream, which left some of them perplexed:

Luca – Noooooooooooooooooossa! Poor thing! He's never had an ice cream?

Alexandre – Wow! How sad!!!

I also said that our first task that day would be to help the ET understand what these two things were. I explained that we would begin with “ice cream”, because it was easier (and we could practice with that before we turned to the word “grandmother”); that I would play the part of the ET, pinning him to my clothes; that when I couldn't understand something they had said I would ask new questions and they would have to explain better “what they meant by that” (making it possible for me to go in greater depth into some of the interesting issues the children had raised); that they would have to speak in turn (so that everyone had a turn) and that they couldn't repeat what someone else had said.

- Who wants to begin? – I asked the children.

- Me! Me! – they all cried.

The drawing reproduced below shows how many different things the children found to say to describe ice cream. After playing with them, we did the same for the word “grandmother”, also exploring the different meanings of the word “grandfather”, which are not presented here because they will be analyzed in the next chapters. One day, in the fourth meeting, Luck asked me, “Anne, can't we teach the ET again? It was such fun!”.

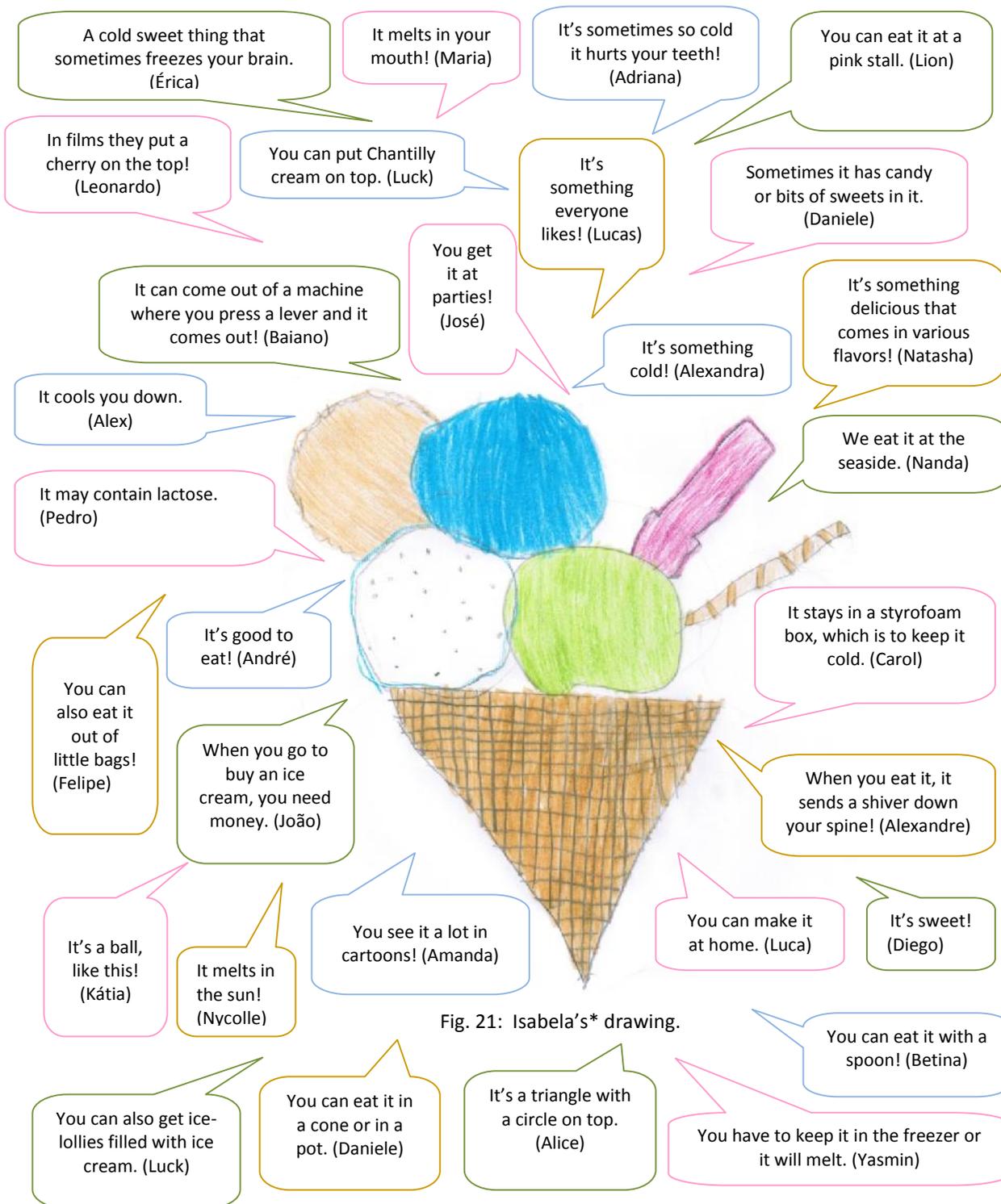


Fig. 21: Isabela's\* drawing.

## Activity 2: The Different Ages of Grandparents

The second activity involved working with images I had cut out of magazines. These images were A5 in size and represented, as can be seen below, men and women of different ages. I explained to the children that I was going to show them four images of different people and that they would have to guess the age of each one, trying to come to an



agreement. “We could do this... If I think he’s 18 and he thinks he’s 20, we could say he’s 19, which is in between”, suggested Luca concerning what I meant by “come to an agreement”. “Great! This will be fun!”, Nycolle exclaimed.

I showed six groups the images of the men:



Fig. 22: Images of men shown to children for them to guess their ages.

And I showed the other six groups images of women:



Fig. 23: Images of women shown to the children for them to guess their ages.

The images were shown to the children one by one, and when they all agreed on the age, I wrote this down on a piece of colored paper, placing it beside the photo on the table. The main objective of this activity was not the attribution of age in itself, even though the markers that the children used to identify the age were extremely interesting, but the subsequent identification established between age, image (and its identity markers) and “being a grandparent”. When the children had guessed the age of the four people, we put them in chronological order (from the youngest to the oldest) and I asked them if, looking at the images together, they would like to change the age they had guessed for them, which they almost always did.



Then I asked the group if any of these people could not be a grandmother or grandfather, in an attempt to find out whether the children identified grandparents with some age marker or other. If they thought yes, I set the image apart, and, of the remaining three, left only the youngest and the oldest, asking them about what differences there might be between having a younger or an older grandparent. The ages attributed by the six groups did not differ much. For the women they guessed as follows: Figure 1 (between 40 and 50 years); Figure 2 (between 60 and 75 years); Figure 3 (between 55 and 65 years) and Figure 4 (between 98 and 110 years). And for the men: Figure 1 (between 45 and 50 years); Figure 2 (one group suggested 35 and the others between 45 and 53 years); Figure 3 (five groups suggested 65 and one 80 years) and Figure 4 (between 78 and 92 years).

## *Interview 2*

- **Topic:** The children's families: do grandparents form part of the family? To what extent?

**Aims:** **1.** To understand the children's family structure better, in order to investigate questions such as how, when, and why they see their grandparents. Who do they live with exactly? What is the routine of children, especially those whose parents are separated? When do they see each other? How do they experience this? Who went to live with whom in the case of extended families? **2.** To find out whether children consider grandparents to be a direct part of the family or whether they see families as composed only by parents and children. What are the children's inclusion and exclusion criteria? Are grandparents included when they live under the same roof or when they see their grandchildren every day? Are there differences between the children, depending on the type of relationship they have with their grandparents? Why do they include or exclude them?

### **Activity 1: Drawing a Family on Colored Paper**

For this meeting, I prepared a relatively quick drawing activity. As I did not know how many people the children would draw – whether they would include only the more immediate family members, the people they live with, or others –, I needed to find a strategy that would give them the time to draw as many people as they wanted, without



needing to color the drawing in. So, I prepared 36 painted sheets of paper, so that the children only needed to draw their families with black pens of different widths.



Fig. 24: Materials used to draw the children's families.

When they received the materials, the children were very excited:

Daniele – They're beautiful! Did you make them, Anne?

Yasmin – Look, it's colored! How beautiful!

Lion – It looks like camouflage!

Lucas – They're super awesome!

Alice – My God! How pretty the background is! Anne, can you give us a copy of this? It's so beautiful!

They were enthralled by the colors and shapes:

Pedro – How did you get it like this?

Amanda – It's great! Mine's got yellow! Look, mine has this color here, half orange, half red...

Alexandra, trying to make out shapes in the colors – Look here, I can see a dolphin!

Maria – I can see a tree in mine!

Daniele – The drawing is in black because that's the only color missing here!

When the children had finished their drawings, I began to investigate who they had represented: Can you tell me who the people you have drawn are? Why do you think they form part of your family? How do you know when someone is part of the family or not? Did you draw anyone who doesn't live with you? And if you did: why did you draw this grandparent and not the other? During the conversation I also explored questions relating to marriage, divorce, living with step-parents and step-siblings, in order to understand the effect these relations had on contact with grandparents. Using the information given by the children, I gradually put together each of their family trees, which helped me to understand the basic structure, the relations, the separations, and the dynamics of their family groups. I



used this as the basis for all further meetings. During this meeting, I did not include the grandparents in the family tree – except those the children had drawn – so as not to affect the following activity: drawing the grandparents.

### *Interview 3*

- **Topic:** Grandparents and what they are called
- **Aims:** **1.** To get to know who the children's grandparents are, and how they include or exclude them according to various criteria, such as: remarriage, death, affection, geographical proximity, and so forth. **2.** To find out what the grandchildren call their grandparents and vice-versa.

#### **Activity 1: Drawing Grandparents with toothpicks**

For this meeting, I prepared a different kind of art activity: a kind of drawing made without writing materials, using only toothpicks. This technique made it possible for the children to experience a pleasing sense of surprise and discovery throughout the act of creation. The materials were prepared as follows:

1. First I colored all the sheets of paper with brightly colored crayons:



Fig. 25: Stages in the preparation of materials for the drawing grandparents activity.

2. Then, I covered all the sheets with two coats of black gouache, which I left to dry for at least two days:



Fig. 26: Stages in the preparation of materials for the drawing grandparents activity.

3. Finally, I handed out wooden and metal toothpicks of different widths for the children draw their grandparents on the sheet. As they drew, the black paint was scratched off and, to their surprise and delight, the colors appeared:

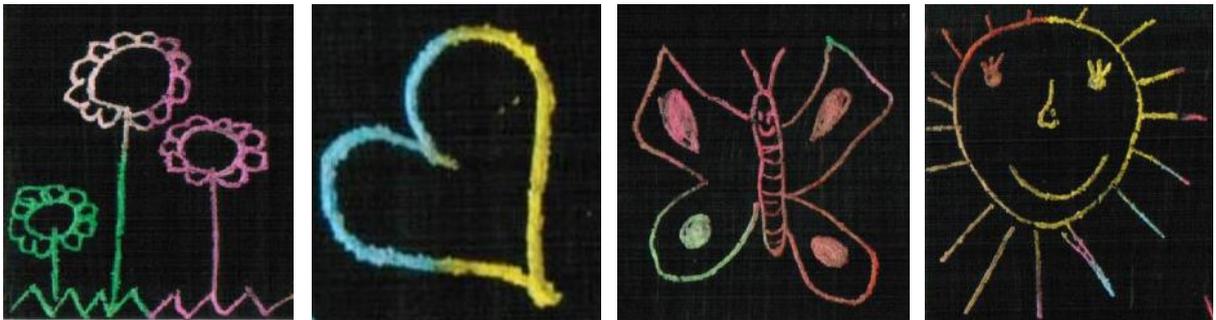


Fig. 27: Enlarged details of artwork by Alice, Jaqueline, Natasha and Gabriella.

The children were very enthusiastic about this, as they experimented with the sheets of paper, as can be seen from the following remarks:

- Érica – Oh, I'm scared, Anne! (She scratches the gouache with the pick for the first time) Oh, it's colored, look at that!!! It's colored! Look how beautiful it is!
- Fernanda – Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh! (breathes deeply) How coooooool! Look! Look here! Look how cool it is, man!
- Daniele – It's beautiful! Beautiful! Look at the color!
- Alice – How cool! It's colored! Each one is a different color! Awesome!
- Leonardo – That's super cool!
- Lion – It changed color! Now my drawing's orange!
- Nycolle – Look, it's turned purple! I love that color!
- Catarina – Look at my grass: it's green, pink, brown, now it's blue, red, yellow, green again, orange, pink, white... How cool!
- Alice – Do you know what I think is the coolest thing? The mixture of colors!
- Lucas – It's a shame we can't take this home, because it's cool!



One of the greatest mysteries was how it worked:

Fernando – Scratch! How does the scratching work? It's an ordinary toothpick?

Amanda – What did you put in the point of the toothpick to make it colored?

Lion – Where did you buy this?

Amanda – Will it work if I take a black sheet and a toothpick to draw?

Felipe [tests the toothpick on a white sheet and asks]: Why doesn't it work here?

Melissa – Did you make this? Will you tell me how to do it later?

I only told the children that they should draw their grandparents, without going into any more detail. However, they kept asking questions: “Should we draw all the grandparents we have?” (Catarina); “Can we draw ourselves?” (Gabriella); “Can I draw only my grandparents who live here?” (Alexandra); “Do we have to draw grandparents who have died?” (Amanda). I responded to all the questions in the same way: “The task today is to draw your grandparents; you decide which ones of them you are going to draw”. In the early stages of the activity, I asked them who they were starting with and why they had chosen that person. When the drawing was finished, I could see who the children had drawn and asked them some questions about which grandparents they had included in or excluded from their work: were all their biological grandparents there? Had they drawn dead grandparents? Are step-parents' parents considered grandparents? Had they included grandparents' new partners? Based on this, I filled in the grandparents' part of the children's family trees, attempting to understand, in context, the choices the children had made and the reasons for them. During the meeting, we also talked about the names the children had for their different grandparents and what the grandparents called them.

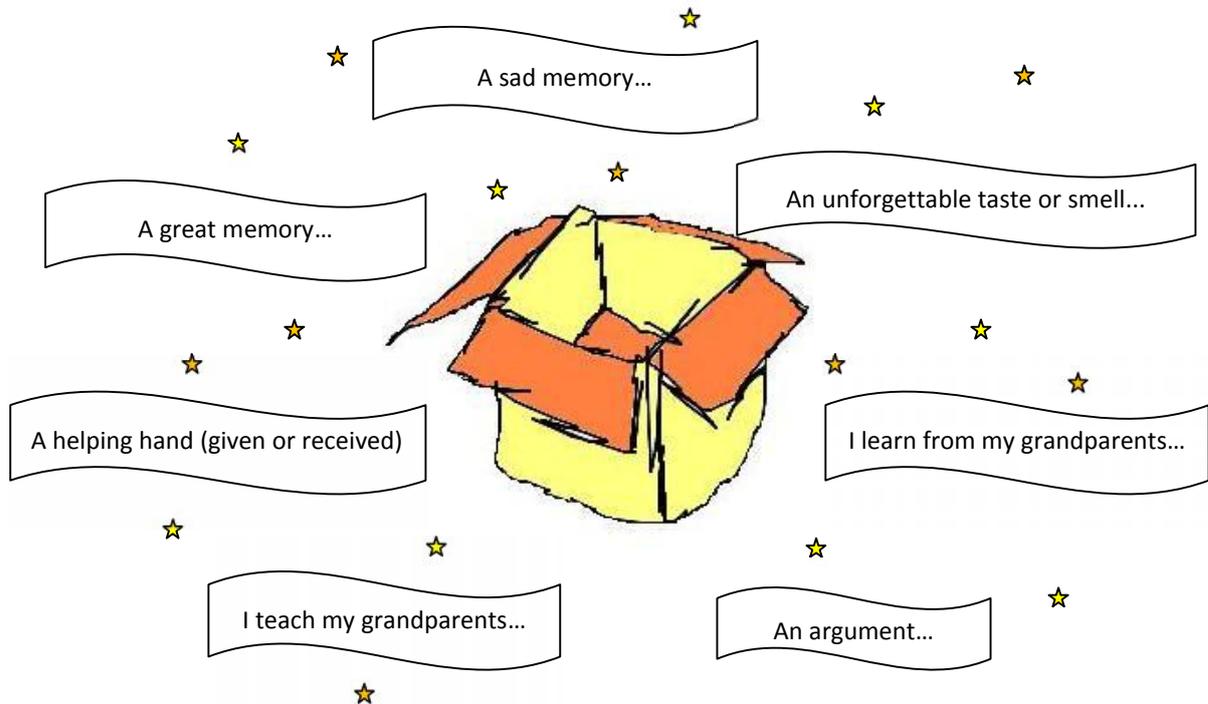
### *Interview 4*

- **Topic:** Intergenerational exchange between grandparents and grandchildren
- **Aims:** To investigate the important features of living with grandparents, such as the activities that they engage in when they are together, the things they learn from and teach to each other, sad and happy memories, times when they have given or received help, situations in which they have argued and how they felt about that: tastes and smells that evoke memories.



### Activity 1: The Box Game

I placed seven folded slips of paper on which I had written different phrases in a box:



The children were seated in a circle and each of them drew a slip of paper and talked to the group about it, exploring everyday situations involving their grandparents. They also received two colored sheets of paper (See illustration on the right) in which they could give small illustrations of the situations discussed or add new ones. These sheets contained exactly the same topics as the slips, with the exception of “an argument”, which was only included in the conversation. For this meeting, I also brought coloring materials, such as crayons, colored pencils and the like. This activity was done partly during the interview and partly at home. I also noted on this sheet which grandparent the children were referring to.

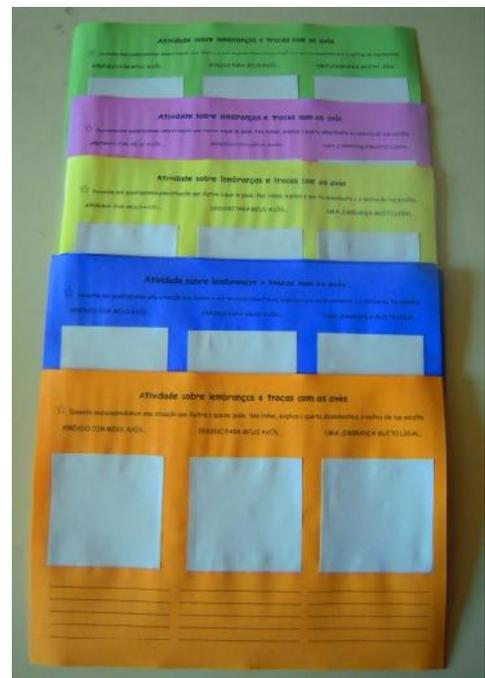


Fig. 28: Activity on things that the children and their grandparents share.



## Interview 5

- **Topic:** Geographical distance and frequency of contact
- **Aims:** To find out how children interact with their grandparents depending on the frequency and intensity of contact, and the effect of geographical location and separations on this relationship. Do their grandparents live nearby or far away? Who visits whom? When the children visit, who takes them? When do these meetings occur? Do grandchildren and grandparents communicate by other means, such as by telephone, letter, or e-mail?

### Activity 1: Drawing Maps: distance, proximity, and contact

The aim of this activity was to draw a map in which we could see the distance between the grandparents' and the grandchildren's homes, the frequency of contact and the forms of communication used. All these criteria were personal – such as evaluating if they see them little or a lot, feeling close or distant – and meanings suggested by the children themselves by way of codes agreed during the meeting. For this activity, I prepared miniature models of homes (houses and apartment blocks) and means of transport (walking, car, bus, and plane) made of colored foamy (EVA – Ethylene Vinyl Acetate):

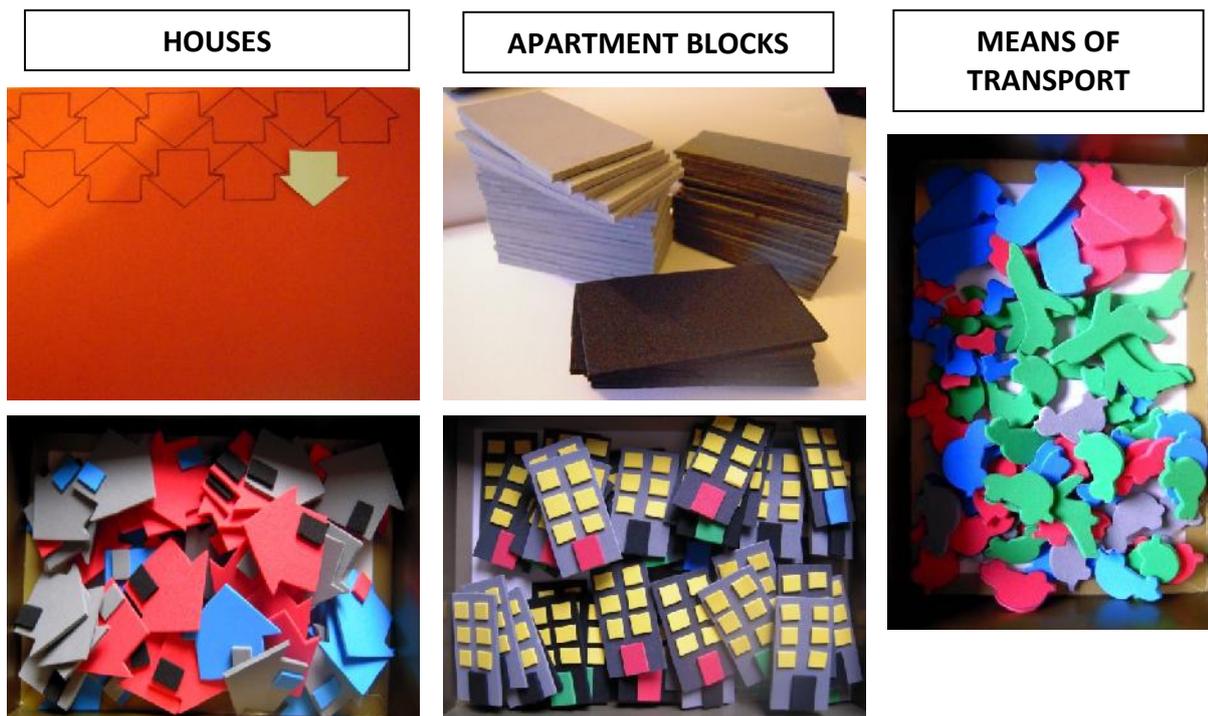


Fig. 29: Foamy materials produced for map-making activity.



Each child received an A3 sheet of paper (297mm long by 420mm wide), with enough space to draw a map of the distance and forms of contact between the child and their grandparents. First, I asked the children if they lived in a house or an apartment, and gave them the appropriate model according to their response. Then we did the same for each of their grandparents (including all the living grandparents who for whatever reason had not been included in the drawing produced during Interview 3). The children chose a spot on the sheet of paper to place their home and organized their grandparents' homes around that according to the distance between them. Once they were satisfied, the pieces were glued to the paper and the children wrote in pen where they lived and in pencil where their (maternal, paternal, and so forth) grandparents lived. They also wrote the name of the neighborhood, if they lived in Porto Alegre, or the name of the city, if they did not.

The second stage was to trace the route between the children's homes and those of their grandparents according to the distance and the means of transport used. The children had to find a way of communicating whether the journey was long or short, indicating the means of transport used and placing an arrow to show who visits whom: → when the grandchildren go to visit the grandparents; ← when the grandparents come to visit the grandchildren and ← → when both kinds of visits occur. The route was traced in the same color as the means of transport, to aid visualization.

Then, the children took a black pen and, following the key on the right, traced a line between their home and that of their grandparents, thereby demonstrating the relative importance of each.

**I SEE MY GRANDPARENTS:**

Never  
 ----- Little  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Quite often  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Often

**We communicate:**

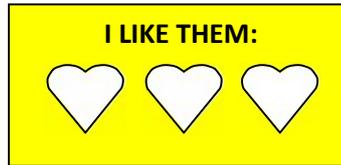
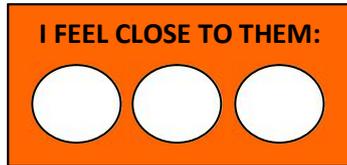
- Face to face:
- By telephone:
- By e-mail:
- By MSN/Skype:
- By letter:
- By Orkut/Facebook:

The fourth step was to fill in the form indicating how the children communicated with their grandparents – with a view to exploring gender differences –, shading one box for little, two for quite often and three for often.

Finally, we worked on two variables more connected to the children's perceptions and feelings: how close they felt to their grandparents (in the sense of knowing about each other's lives, being friends, and so forth) and how much they liked them, following the same



shading code: one (a little), two (quite a bit) and three (a lot). In this case, a lot of children wanted to give different answers for their grandmothers and grandfathers:



## Interview 6

- **Topic:** My grandparents home and family meetings
- **Aims:** **1.** To find out about the grandchildren's favorite places in their grandparents' houses and the meanings they attribute to them: What are these places? What do they do there? Do the children have personal possessions that are kept at their grandparents' homes? How are the grandparents' homes altered to receive the grandchildren? Where do they play when they are there? Do they have secret hiding places? When and why do they use them? **2.** To find out the times when the children meet their grandparents apart from daily care: Do they meeting during the holidays? Weekend lunches? Religious festivals? Birthdays?

### Activity 1: Photograph of Grandparents' Homes

This activity was announced and explained in the first meeting, so that the children would have enough time to carry it out. As my aim was to find out about the homes of their grandparents and the places the children use to play and move about when they are there, there was no better way than to find out what they wanted to show. So, I asked them to borrow a camera from their parents or grandparents – many of them already had their own – to produce a visual register. I also handed them slip of paper explaining the task and authorization letters to be signed by their grandparents (Appendix 7). They could choose to do this in one grandparent's home or in that of several grandparents. Those whose grandparents lived far away or who were not going to visit them during this period could draw their favorite places on a sheet of paper specially designed for this that I also handed out.

Many of the photos were sent by email. I printed them out and placed them in separate envelopes addressed to each child. During the meeting, each one received his or



her envelope and presented the photographs to me and the other children, telling us what the place was and what they do there. The children themselves decided the order in which the photos would be presented. The other children played an active part in the activity, commenting on similar places in their grandparents' houses or asking questions. I got the impression that we were actually visiting the houses and that children were our hosts. During this meeting, we also talked, as people do when looking at a photo album, about photographs of family gatherings that some had brought and about the presents exchanged between grandparents and grandchildren, especially on festive occasions.

The children's photographs are seen here as a visual language through which they are able to express and capture moments and places that hold special significance for them: spaces, angles and perspectives that make sense from the child's point of view, but which might be considered irrelevant by adults. By proposing an activity in which the children are the photographers encourages them to make choices about what to photograph and what not to (White, Bushin, Carpena-Méndez & Laoire, 2010), about what is worth showing. "Photographs change and broaden our ideas of what is worth looking at and what we have the right to see" (Sontag, 2008, p.13). However, as with the drawings, the photographs need to be accompanied by a report of the children's intentions, which bring the photos they have taken in their grandparents' homes to life.

It should thus be pointed out that the empirical data in Chapter 4 regarding the grandparents' homes, uses not only the children's written work, but also their photos and drawings, to show how they view the everyday life they lead in their grandparents' homes. These illustrations present what is, to some extent, a normative view of the children's day-to-day relations with their grandparents. I have tried to see these images like as they present themselves visually (Bizarro, 2010), thereby giving voice to that which they refer to or evoke, in so far as this is relevant to this thesis, as a discursive practice on an equal footing with the written assignments. By regarding images as discourse, I am making a conscious effort not to extract various levels of hidden meaning, or to regard them as absolute truths, in line with Foucault's (2001) understanding of the term 'discourse'. I see the images and the written discourse alike as being produced and constituting itself visually and thereby bearing witness to these childhood spaces and the childhoods they depict. These images of the architecture



of childhood and the way that children relate to domestic space accord well with theoretical work on this subject and with the children's own experience of their grandparents' homes.

## Last Meeting



Fig. 30: Examples of presents the children received at the farewell meeting.

Apart from the materials produced by the children during our six meetings, I had also prepared a short writing assignment to be done at home (Appendix 8). However, seeing the number of subjects to be covered and the little free time the children had, I decided it was better not to overload them with an extra task. We agreed that we would arrange one extra meeting, at which they could write this text and that we would also have a farewell party. I also provided pink, yellow, green and blue paints so that they could illustrate their work. On the day of the last meeting, I decorated the room with balloons and set up two separate tables. On one of them, I laid out

drinks, sweets and snacks I had bought, covering them all with a tablecloth until the time of the party. On the other, I placed a single Russian doll. When the children arrived – this time all six together – I said that I had brought this doll because I thought that it had “a lot to do” with our research. I let the children open the *babushka* and find the other dolls inside, seeing how they related to our research.

We bade each other farewell with much joy. I received lots of presents from the children and I also gave them a souvenir. As it was the day before the beginning of the World Cup, I made each one of them a football fan kit (Fig. 31), in which I placed some toys that they could use during the games. As Felipe and Guizzo (2004) point out, when dealing



Fig. 31: My leaving presents for the children.



with children, it is necessary to take special care not only regarding the way in which we enter and behave in the field, but also with the way we take our leave. Affective ties are built up during research and need to be taken into account by the researcher. To some extent, farewell parties play this role: they close the cycle; celebrate a rite of passage. Many children bade me farewell hoping to see me the next year when I had said the thesis would be ready and they too would be able to see the results. “And, if I’m not at this school any more, how will you find me?” some of them asked. I noted down each of their phone numbers to ensure that we could keep in touch.

Above, we can see some examples of farewell notes I received from the children that day<sup>27</sup>:



Fig. 32: Examples of farewell cards I received from the children: 1) Natasha; 2) Alice and Amanda; 3) Nycolle.

However, the farewell party and the completion of the field research did not put an end to that “interpersonal bridge” – to go back to Errante (2000) – that had been built up

<sup>27</sup> Farewell card 1 – “Dear Anne, I would like to say that I loved meeting you. Good luck. It was really important helping you with this [thesis] because I love my granny so much. I’ll miss you! With love! Big kiss!” (Natasha); Farewell card – “Have a nice trip! Sorry you are leaving! We love you!” (Alice and Amanda); Farewell card 3 – “Anne, is only a four letter word. But a blessed one. It is a small word, but the whole of heaven fits into it! Only god is greater! I love you!” (Nycolle).



over time between the children and I. As in any other relationship, ties do not necessarily break down because we stop seeing each other. We can miss people and be missed, as some of the children said in written notes they gave me and in the email that I received from a child after I had already left:

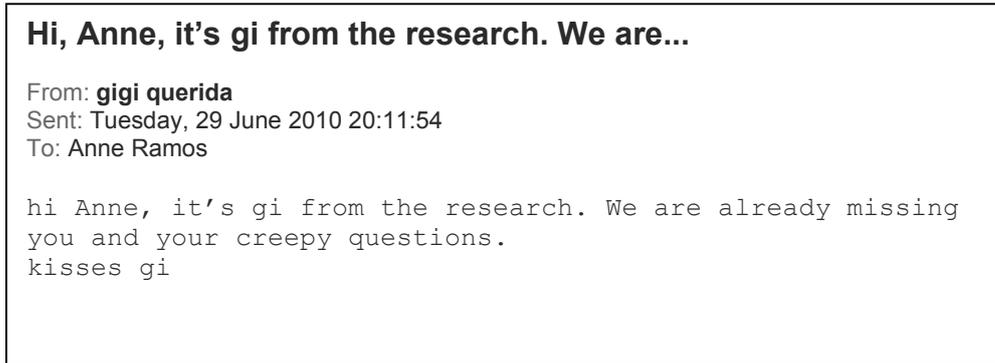
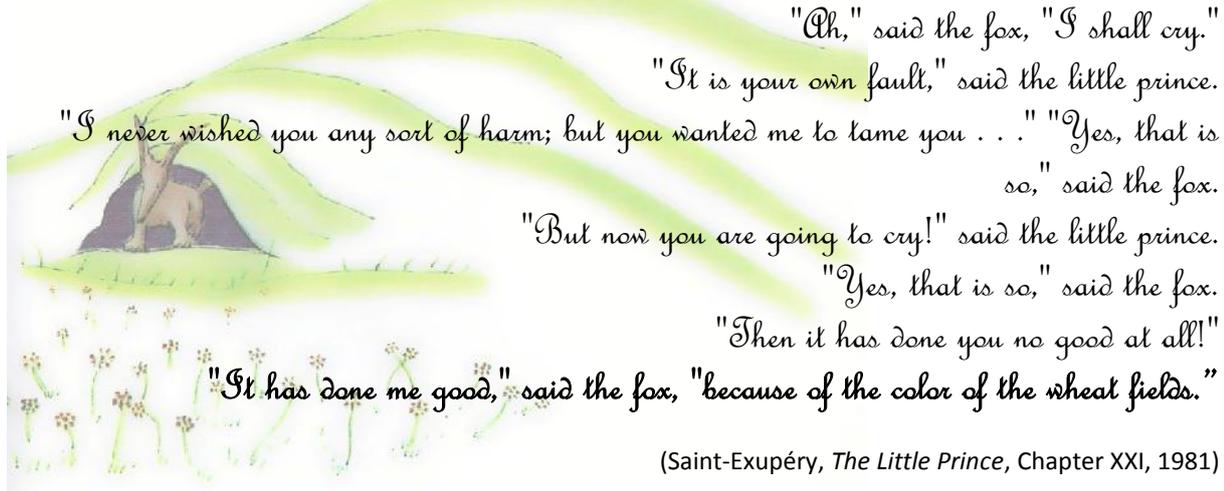


Fig.33: Text of an email I received by a participant of the research.

"And then look: you see the grain-fields down yonder? I do not eat bread. Wheat is of no use to me. The wheat fields have nothing to say to me. And that is sad. But you have hair that is the color of gold. Think how wonderful that will be when you have tamed me! The grain, which is also golden, will bring me back the thought of you. And I shall love to listen to the wind in the wheat . . . So the little prince tamed the fox. And when the hour of his departure drew near--



(Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, Chapter XXI, 1981)

### 1.4.5 Some Specific Features of Working with Children

Talking with children, especially younger ones, is quite different from talking with adults. It is not uncommon, in the course of an interview, for the questions put by the researcher to be interrupted by games, running commentaries, the singing of a song or the



children moving about in the room. As Graue and Walsh (2003) point out, “it is difficult to carry out a conventional sit-down interview with children” (p.139). The researcher thus needs to be very flexible to be able to learn from and with the children, about their routines, ideas, and experiences.

In the course of the interviews, I often had to come up with strategies for getting the attention of the children back. The room in which we worked was, as I mentioned earlier, the school’s Social Studies lab; the maps, pictures, books and models excited the children’s curiosity, especially since they were materials they did not know about and rarely used. On the ceiling there was a large model of the solar system made of painted polystyrene balls and, in one of the corners, there was an illuminated globe on a table that was the greatest attraction in the room. When the children arrived for the interview, they would run up to it and turn it on and spin it for a few minutes, before we began. They also asked questions about the planets above us and about the models on the shelves. In this small laboratory, there was also a door that was always locked and the children were always looking through the keyhole (especially when they heard a noise behind it), because they were certain that this door led to the residence of the nuns who ran the school. All of this meant that I had to be quite flexible, proactive, and creative, so as to move things along and gradually get the children to ‘come back’ to the research.

### *The Dynamics of Group Interviews*

The fact that the interviews were conducted in groups of three helped a lot to maintain and develop conversation in the group. The children already knew each other and some had been studying together for several years, which meant that they had a high degree of intimacy with one another. As they came from similar families – even though each family had its peculiarities – they also felt comfortable talking about situations similar to their own, such as the fact that all of them lived with their grandparents, that their parents were separated or that they lived with step-parents and maybe step-grandparents. During the interviews, they recognized shared contexts and circumstances, which led them to agree with one another:

Researcher – Your father married again after he separated from your mother, didn’t he?



Alexandra – No. He’s already had loads and loads of girlfriends, but now he’s only got one.

Natasha – *My Dad too.* [2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting]

Or to disagree – “That’s a lie! That’s not true what Pedro said!” (Alexandra, 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting) –, controlling what was being said and making the conversation flow continuously and enthusiastically.

Obviously, interviews in small groups also have their own specific features. Attention is not directed towards one child alone, as in one-to-one interviews, and the questions need to go round the whole group. If the researcher spends a long time talking with just one child, the others may begin to get impatient, which is not good for the overall development of the interview. For this reason, I had to put a lot of energy into asking the questions, making sure that all of them had their say and, at the same time, ensuring that I was able to go in some depth into the specific situation of each. Although I had a list of aims to be achieved for each meeting and a series of questions I was interested in, the interview was always very dynamic and active, and was guided by the children’s own ideas and answers. This is a fairly significant feature of asking questions in small groups. With the support of their peers, the narrative structure of the interview tended to be less highly structured and more lively, which allowed both researcher and children to guide and control the conversation. The example cited below shows identification with a similar family situation between Fernando and Fernanda, and also the way they guide the conversation, bringing to light data very relevant to the study:

Fernando – All the people in my family live in the same block. It has three floors: me, my mother, my sister, and my grandmother live together. My aunt lives above us and my great aunt below.

Fernanda – And your father?

Fernando – I don’t have one...

Fernanda – How come you don’t have one?

Fernando – Didn’t you know?

Fernanda – No...

Fernando – You must have forgotten...

Fernanda – You never told me. Did he die?

Fernando – Dunno!

Fernanda – You don’t know anything about your father? You never met him?

Fernando – No...

I look at Fernanda’s drawing, seeing she hasn’t drawn her father either and ask:

Researcher – You asked about Fernando’s father, but where’s yours?

Fernanda – Oh, he lives somewhere else. That’s why I didn’t put him in ...

Fernando – I prefer not having a father... It’s one less person bossing you around!

Fernanda – That’s true! My father doesn’t live with me either... All the better! [2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting]



Another fairly common characteristic of interviews with children is the brevity of their utterances, often restricted to “a single word” (Dermatini, 2005). However, this does not mean that the children are not expressing themselves or engaging in conversation. They may respond in few words because they are shy, because they are daunted by the interview, because they don’t want to touch on this subject, because they did not understand the question very well, or because that single word does indeed convey the essence of what they are thinking. The researcher therefore needs to evaluate the situations, trying out new routes, sometimes parallel and winding ones, by way of rewording the question, taking a different tack or using a variety of circumstances. Inviting a child to think aloud or rephrasing the question by putting it in a more contextualized fashion (“Imagine that...”) proved to be highly effective field-work strategies. The fact that children were in groups of three also helped to smooth communication and make conversation, since they helped each other, explaining what I had asked in their own words or using other examples.

However, the researcher also needs to make the children feel comfortable about giving answers such as “Dunno” or “Whatever”, or to remain silent when faced with a sensitive issue that they don’t want to go into. Such a conducive atmosphere can only be created if the children know how they are allowed to act and react in the field. As subjects of investigation, they also need to know their rights and it should be clear to them that they can refuse to take part in any activity or refuse to answer certain questions that upset them in some way. Explaining to them that, in research – different from school – there are no right or wrong answers may also help them to express themselves more freely. Thus I took an important ethical decision, which helped to reduce the power distance between adults and children: I drew up a Terms of Informed Consent for Children (Appendix 9).

### *The Terms of Informed Consent for Children*

During my Masters research (Ramos, 2006), in which I also worked with children, I had decided to get them to sign the Terms of Informed Consent along with their parents. However, this was a document written and sent to their parents or guardians. Over the years, as I developed my knowledge of the research ethics and research methodology when working with children, I came to the idea of devising a *Terms of Informed Consent* made for and addressed specifically to children. I believe that no-one, not even their parents, should



have the full right to consent on their behalf. They may, as their legal guardians, give permission for them to participate, but it is the child – with the exception of research with babies – who should ultimately agree to participate or not (Goldim, 2009). If it is they who are actually going to take part in the research and if we strive to see children as subjects with rights, is it not important that they too sign and have full (physical and verbal) access to the *Terms of Consent*?

Therefore, in our very first meeting, we read and signed the *Terms of Informed Consent*, clearly explaining all the items contained within it. Most of them had already had it explained to them in class that they could make a conscious choice to participate in the drawing of lots or not. We signed the two differently colored copies of the Terms in pen (which, for many of them, signified a serious commitment, as they were used to writing in pencil): one for me and one for them. “It’s a kind of contract!”, Carol



Fig. 34: The Children’s Terms of Informed Consent.

said. Now they knew their rights, the children were happy to exercise them, without causing them any embarrassment or getting in the way of what we were supposed to be doing:

Pedro, when I asked him if he had any contact with his father, said – Ah, I don’t want to talk about that, I decided that I don’t want to talk about my father. [2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting]

Researcher – You only put your grandparents on your father’s side in the picture, didn’t you?

Maria – Yes.

Researcher – Why didn’t you draw your maternal grandparents?

Maria – Because I didn’t want to... I knew you would ask me that...

(silence)

Alexandra – *If you don’t want to answer, you can say so, remember?*

Maria – *That’s right! I don’t want to answer to this question, OK?* [3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting]

Sometimes they chose not to talk about sensitive issues in the group, but came to talk to me afterwards or told me something personal “in private”. In these situations, the children asked me to keep it a secret: they wanted to share something that had happened to them or that they had been through with me, but they did not want me to divulge this information to others.



## *Confidentiality and Recognition: the choice of names*

When we read the *Terms of Consent* I also explained to the children that, in research, we cannot use people's real names, because this was a way researchers had found of preserving the confidentiality and privacy of participants. However, I did not want to choose the names that would appear in the thesis alone. I wanted them to be able to recognize themselves and to like the name they had been given. So I asked them to choose their own pseudonyms, which was a lot of fun. I had noted that some children in the 4th year played a lot of "make-believe" in which they pretended to be other people during the day. This would work more or less like this: two very good friends would swap names; Alice would become Melissa and Melissa would become Alice; and when someone addressed them, they would only respond if the person called them by the correct, swapped names. They would also "tease" the teacher with this game, because they would respond to her according to the rules of the game they had created. I realized that taking on an assumed name could be made into a game very similar to the one they played. During our meetings, many of them preferred to be called by these assumed names and to sign their work with them. Some children also changed their name various times, until they felt that they had found the "perfect name". This choice was so important to them that, sometimes, they could not wait for the day of the interview and came and told me before the interview that they had changed their mind about the name.

Obviously, I agreed with the children that names very different from their own could not be chosen, because it would look very strange in the thesis if I had to write "And then *Harry Potter* said... and *Avatar* replied", which made them laugh out loud and agree with me immediately. The choice of "institutionalized names", which involve a direct identification on the part of the children with their idols, has already been remarked on by Kramer (2002) as a characteristic of the children's preferences when choosing their names and it is thus important to come to a prior agreement with them on this matter. The children used various criteria to come up with their names: some chose the name of their best friend, others that of parents or relatives, some names that they liked and some the names of famous musicians, film or soap stars, because these can be common names, that do not necessarily sound strange, such as choosing the name Alice, from the film, *Alice in Wonderland*. Because Brazil is a melting-pot of different races and cultures, some names of non-Portuguese origin



have come into the language, such as Washington, Aimée and Klaus. As in the game of swapping names, the choice of the name for the research was also mediated by a strong identification between the child and the person whose name they chose.

Adriana – I chose Adriana, which is my mother’s name!

Melissa – I’m going to choose Melissa, because I love Me. She’s my best friend!

Yasmin – Yasmin has been my favorite name since I was little!

Daniele – I want to be called Daniele because it sounds like my cousin’s name. it’s a nice name and I like her! Her name is Daniela...

Lion – Lion is the name of a really cool car!

Kuity – Kuity, because I once had a friend called Kuity!

Leonardo – My name is going to be Leonardo, because of Leonardo da Vinci!

### *On the use of the voice recorder*

The interviews were all recorded and obviously the voice recorder did not go unnoticed by the children. They knew from the start that I needed to record what they were saying, because I had mentioned that it would be impossible for me to remember everything we had said and I wanted to use the exact words they had spoken:

Melissa – Are you going to write exactly what we said?

Researcher – Yes. Later I’m going to listen to it at home and write down what you said.

Melissa – Wow! Cool! [1<sup>st</sup> Meeting]

The fact that they were being recorded during the meetings made them feel very important and they liked pretending they too were researchers, extending the microphone to the person they wanted to talk to. The interviews were full of play, which is important in child culture. I myself was interviewed by Baiano, during the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting, and he asked me the same questions I had asked them:

Baiano – Now it’s our turn to interview you! Tell me about a sad memory:

Researcher – A sad memory for me was when my grandparents died.

Carol – Wow! We’re going to do research with you too!

Baiano – What did you learn from your grandparents?

Researcher – What did I learn from my grandmother? To speak Italian.

Luck – Cool! I’m from an Italian family too!

Baiano – A helping hand?

Researcher – A helping hand? When my grandfather was sick and I helped him out of bed.

Baiano – An argument?

Researcher – My grandmother lives on a farm... Once, when I was child, I thought it was very funny that my grandfather had a hunting dog that obeyed him... He chased the chickens out of the house. So, one day I tried to make him obey me too, except I forgot to tell him to stop chasing the chickens... When my grandmother



noticed what was going on, he had already killed six or seven chickens and she was very angry with me...

Baiano – A smell or a taste?

Researcher – The cake my grandmother used to make! I've been eating it since I was younger than you. Even now, when I go there, she makes it for me...

Baiano – And the last question! A really cool memory to finish the interview off on a happy note...

Researcher – A really cool memory was when my grandmother sang a song at my wedding.

Luck – Really? Cool!

Carol – How cool!

Baiano – Awesome! Cheers!

They also noted that my voice recorder, which was digital, marked the ups and downs of their speech on the screen and, right from the very first meeting, they were fascinated with experimenting with the gadget to find out what it could do:

André – This is like a car radio! It's got a volume control! [1<sup>st</sup> Meeting]

Melissa – Anne, can I ask you something?

Researcher – Yes, of course. What?

Melissa – I want to know what the voice recorder looks like when we're not saying anything!

(We remained silent for a few seconds)

Melissa – Ah! Cool! When we don't say anything the screen goes blank! [1<sup>st</sup> Meeting]

Fernanda – Look at the waves going up and down as we speak!!! Now Anne's talking loud, now more softly, now loud again...

Fernando – Can we try it out?

Fernando lets out different tones of "aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa"

(They laugh a lot)

Fernanda – OK, now let's talk softly to see...

Fernando – Cool!!!

Fernanda – OK, now we can start! (the interview) [2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting]

After the interviews, the children nearly always asked me to play their voices back to them, which they found highly amusing. This also helped them to understand the importance of speaking up and one at a time, which was something I had explained at the beginning of the meeting, but which became very apparent once they had heard for themselves.

Nanda – Can we hear it now?

Researcher – Do you want to hear?

Nanda – Oh, yes!!!

Alex – I do!

André – Done!!! [2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting]



As we can see, the whole process of interviewing children is peppered with the peculiarities of child culture, such as its constant interaction, is playfulness, make-believe, and repetition, which makes working in the field with children quite hard work and demands a lot of time from the researcher. During the meetings they call us over a lot: to look at or play with the materials, to ask help spelling words (is Lilian with L or LH? Does *Jardim Botânico* have an accent? Is it “*madrasta*” or “*madastra*”? Does grandma have a hat or a tick?) or to ask the meaning of words (What does paternal mean? What do you call your step-father’s parents? What do you call the mother of your great grandmother?), and they competed, using their own games such as “Paper, stone, scissors”, to decide who would speak first or sit next to me.

Likewise, interviewing children requires prior preparation of various materials (various terms of consent, instructions for homework, reminders, sheets of paper, and colored drawings...) and also requires various drawing materials (colored and lead pencils, pens, crayons, erasers, scissors, glue, rulers, sheets of paper of different colors and sizes...), which also means that working with children can be expensive. But all this work helps to make the experience of the children more pleasurable and to encourage them to participate more. Because the children found our meetings entertaining, they often don’t wanted to leave:

Fernando – What are we doing now?

Researcher – What are we doing now? We’re leaving because our time’s up...

Fernanda – Oh, no! I don’t want to leave! I want to stay here!

Fernando – Me too!

Catarina – Oh, don’t tell me we’re finishing?!

Adriana – Can’t we stay a bit longer?

Lucas – Why is next week our last meeting?

Researcher – Because I have to go back to Germany!

Lucas – Oh, I want Anne to stay!

Amanda – Oh Anne, it’s great being here with you! It’s such fun!

Kátia – This is the best, coolest research project I’ve done so far!

Research with children requires great creativity. The researcher has to be continually coming up with new ways of listening, observing and analyzing the data generated. These are the peculiar features of the world of the child and, as Scott (2008) reminds us, “it is axiomatic that it is only interviewing children directly that we can understand children’s social words” (p.103).

*“As a needle fits  
in a match-box  
in a crate  
or a haystack,  
in a garden,  
in a pocket  
in a crowd  
a truck,  
or a mountain,  
everything fits  
in the ground.*

*And now I fit into this same body  
which once fit inside my mother,  
as my mother  
in my grandmother  
and before them my great-great-grandmothers  
and before them  
a million distant generations  
that now fit inside me”*

*Araldo Antunes*

*(Fit)*

## Chapter 2

### *The birth of a grandchild, the birth of a grandparent*



*Von Angesicht zu Angesicht* (Source: Knesebeck, 2004)

Whenever a child is born, a grandparent is also born – or reborn. The arrival of a newborn does not change the lives only of the parents who are directly involved in the process of gestation, but also of all family members, signaling a change in the positions each occupy in the sequence of generations. Children become parents, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, parents grandparents, and grandparents great-grandparents. The birth of a child moves everyone up the family tree, ushering in a new stage in the life of all members of the family. The young parents are finally recognized as adults in the eyes of their own parents. Their status as parents puts them on an equal footing with their own mothers and fathers and changes intergenerational relations.

Just as the birth of a first child has a powerful impact on the new parents, it also leaves a mark on the life of the grandparents. There is, as Lins de Barros (1987) puts it, a rite



of passage that ushers in a new phase in the life cycle of the family group. New roles need to be learnt: since “the grandparents will no longer see and play their role in the family merely as parents and the new parents will no longer conduct relations within the family merely as children” (Lins de Barros, 1987, p.64). In this *symbolic changing of places* (Attias-Donfut & Segalen, 1998), the new parents will redefine their position within the family, seeking to legitimize their place on the basis of this new role, while the new grandparents will, as parents, socialize their children as mothers and fathers, and build up a new identity for themselves as grandparents. The ties between grandparents and grandchildren may reveal the quality of their filial ties, as they are broadly pre-determined by the kind of relationship they have established with their own children. It is the middle generation that will usually make it possible to build a bridge between these two non-adjacent generations, which will tend to incline towards the mother’s side and be beset by competition between the maternal and paternal lines, with some individuals remaining more distant and some breaking off completely, especially when families break down and are recomposed.

The birth of a grandchild also symbolizes the perpetuation of family history. It not only seals the relationship between two groups, but also ensures that both families will have descendants, that the family history will continue to be written by new generations, providing continuity between the past, present and future. This line, which began long ago, as far back as the family memory of each one of us is able to stretch, is handed down and revived by the grandparents. They are the ones that ensure “the connection, the passage, and transition from their predecessors, whose vestiges are quickly lost in the darkness of time, to their descendants, who can share only with those who are nearer in the line of succession” (Forquin, 2003, p.1). Grandparents, by including the new grandchild in the order succession, show that there was a time that preceded them, that their parents and grandparents were also once children and that they themselves had their own parents and grandparents. The latter, even though they may no longer be alive, still exist in the present, brought back to life in family stories and the transgenerational ties forged by older generations. At least three other generations may thus be present in the meeting of grandparents, parents and children.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> As Segalen (1999) points out, “the genealogical memory of our society is not very deep. It is confined to around three generations” (p.71).



Carol – My granny tells me lots of stories! Lots of stories from the old days... [See image below]

Researcher – What do you mean by stories from the old days?

Carol – She’s not *that* old... she tells me about when my mother was little, what she used to get up to, she tells me about when she was little herself, that she always had enough to eat because they lived on a plantation, see. And she tells me how *her grandfather* used to travel to Argentina, and he always brought back flour, bread and stuff from there... so that she always had plenty to eat.

João – *I’ve seen my great-grandfather and great-grandmother in photos...* but I don’t think I’ve ever seen my great-great-grandfather...

Alexandre – It’s very unusual to see a photo of a great-great-grandfather! I suppose they didn’t have cameras in those days!

João – Yes, but *my mother has a photo of her grandmother and grandfather...* Did you know that I had a grandfather, I don’t know if he was a great-grandfather or a great-great-grandfather... and do you know what he did? He killed himself! He went crazy, got a knife and killed himself!

Researcher – And who told you this story?

João – My mother. *I wanted to know who my great-grandparents were.* I don’t remember much; it was a long time ago she told me this... I wanted to know their names and who they were and she told me this story.



Fig. 35: Carol’s grandmother telling stories about her childhood.

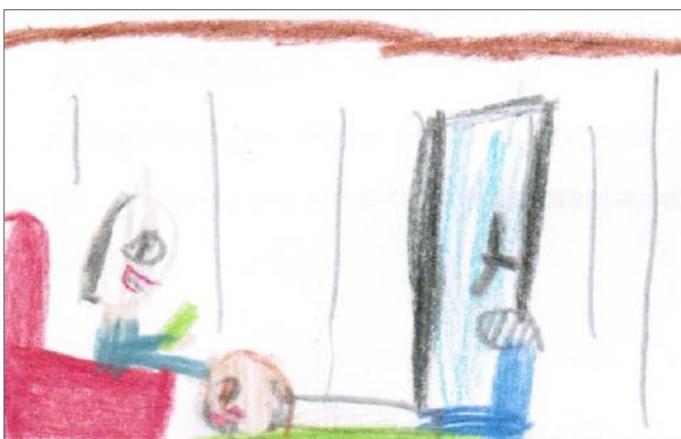


Fig. 36: Drawing by Florencia\*: She is lying down listening to her grandmother telling stories: “I learn a lot about life from my grandparents”, she says, commenting on the drawing.

In Alexandre’s drawing of his family we can see how he locates himself in the family tree, showing that he is a part of a history that preceded his arrival in the world. He places himself in the middle of the two vertical lines representing his mother’s and his father’s side of the family, joining the two with a horizontal line:

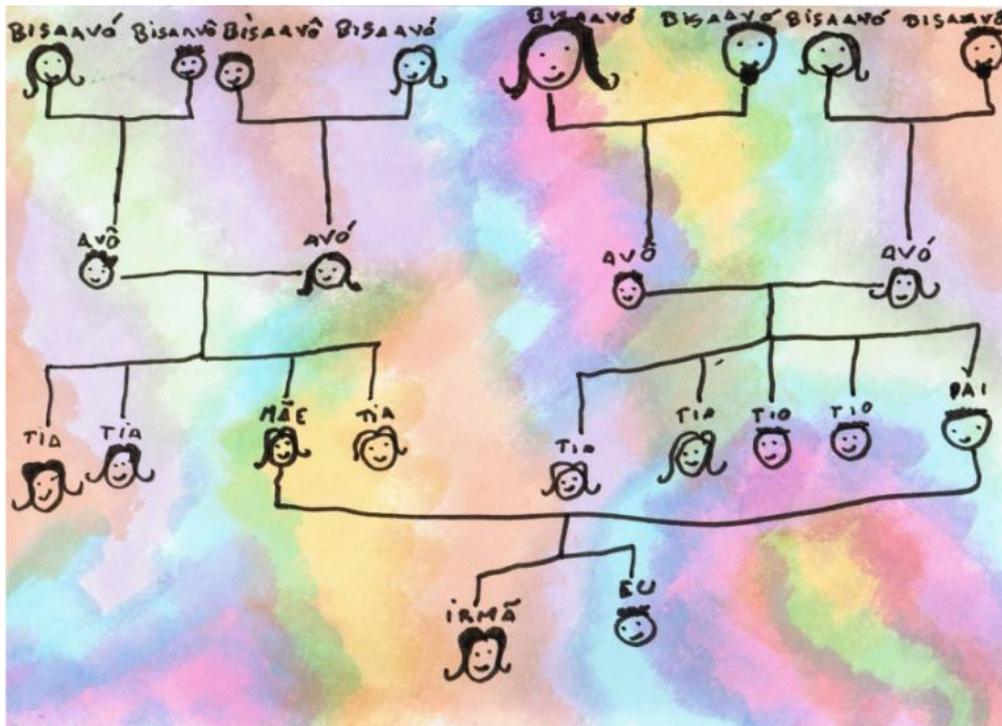


Fig. 37: Alexandre's drawing of his family.

Alexandre – I drew a family tree, with my great-grandmother, with my great-grandfather, with my great-grandmother, with my great-grandfather, with my great-grandmother, with my great-grandfather, with my great-grandmother, with my great-grandfather. They produced my four grandparents and various brothers and sisters that I don't remember... then my grandmother and grandfather who are already dead married and had five boys and one of them was my father. And my other grandparents had four daughters and one of them was my mother. Then my father and mother got married and had me and my sister... That's my family... I couldn't draw any more, because I'd need a sheet of paper a thousand kilometers long...

Researcher – And how do you see yourself in this? How do you see yourself with so many people around you?

Alexandre – That's how it was, I was born in the middle of this family here [the mother's] and this one here [the father's]...

When a child develops this notion of time, seeing itself as part of a family continuum, this also signifies an awareness of the importance of fecundity and the value of the genes inherited not only from parents but also from grandparents. The latter represent the genetic bedrock of the family. “Without them, nothing would exist, because it was through them that the indispensable and most precious gift of life was handed down.” (Dolto, 1998a, p.177). It is only because their grandparents gave life to their parents that their parents were able to give life to the children. “When I think about my grandmother, I remember that it was her who brought me into the world, because she had my mother and my mother had me”, as Gabriella put it. Through this notion of continuity, the grandchild perceives him- or

herself as being rooted in time, in a time that is immemorial, but which leaves albeit unseen and obscure vestiges: “If they, our mothers, our grandmothers, our great-grandmothers and our great-great-grandmothers hadn’t existed, we wouldn’t exist!”, Catarina argued during one of our meetings.

Grandparents, by holding up the genetic base of the family, give the grandchildren a kind of “gift of immortality” (Attias-Donfut & Segalen, 1998), showing them that the past, even though it may be intangible, continues to exist and will extend into the future through the children they will have one day and on through their own grandchildren: “We are the continuation of the family line”, Fernando said. “One day we’ll be mothers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers”, Adriana muses. “And if we live longer we’ll be great-great grandparents and great-great-great grandparents”, Gabriella concludes. This flourishing line that stretches into past and future leads Lion to ask himself: “Could someone from the 12<sup>th</sup> century be a member of our family? And from the year dot?”. Alexandre also tries to trace his family history back in time, concluding that “everything began with a single family: Adam and Eve. If they hadn’t had children, we wouldn’t be here now”.

Grandparents do not represent the “genetic bedrock” of the family only because they produced children who in turn produced grandchildren; but because there is a transmission of genes from one generation to the next. Around a quarter of our genetic makeup was inherited from our grandparents (Rüschemeyer, 2009). This means that some characteristics, such as physical appearance, eye and hair color – or even the tendency to develop certain diseases such as diabetes and hypertension – may not come “directly from our parents” and some children may even inherit a certain physical trait from an ancestor they have never met. “Grandparents know who their grandchildren are because of their appearance,” Baiano says, “because we look like their children”. Recessive genes, such as blue eyes, may be present in the parents’ genotype without manifesting itself, but may appear as a physical characteristic in the phenotype of their children. Hence, “having the same blood” is, for some children, one of the things that bind them together as a family:

Researcher – How do you know if someone is part of your family or not?

Alexandre – It must be in the blood. It’s in the DNA.

João – It’s like in the soap opera, where they were saying that Dora’s son’s father was so and so... and they had to find out who the father was. So they did a blood test to find out...



João drew a picture of his grandparents, writing that they were “blood relatives”, showing that the blood that flows in his veins is the same that flows in theirs, that they are internally connected with each other:



Fig. 38: Drawing of João's grandparents.

The relation between ancestors and descendents is nicely symbolized by the *Matryoshka* dolls, which are Russian dolls coming originally from Japan. The name *Matryona* or *Maiyoshka* is derived from the Latin *mater* meaning mother. In Serbia, the female version is called *бабушка* (*babushka*) meaning “grandma”, and the male version *дедушка* (*dyedushka*) meaning “grandpa”. The origin of this tradition concerns the very idea of fecundity. It is said that an old man who carved and sold the dolls once made one that was so beautiful that he didn't want to part with it and placed it on his bedside table as an ornament. He gave her the name of *Matryoshka*. Before going to bed, he would always ask the doll if she was happy. One night she decided to ask him for a baby, to make her happiness complete. So he carved a smaller doll, sawed the *Matryoshka* in half and put the new doll inside her, calling it *Trioshka*. The following night, *Trioshka* also asked for a child. So the craftsman carved another even smaller doll and put it inside *Trioshka*. He gave her the

name of Oshka. The following night it was Oshka's turn to ask for a child. But, this time, the craftsman quickly painted a mustache on the baby he had carved and called him Ka. As he was a boy child, the craftsman was certain that the new baby would not be able to give birth to another one and would not ask him to carve another doll.<sup>29</sup>

The smallest doll, which is the only one that can't be opened, can also be interpreted as a child, who has not yet given life to a new generation: "The youngest one doesn't open because it hasn't had children yet", as Alexandre put it. "When it grows up, it will be like this one (the penultimate doll) and will have a child of its own". "This one is the smallest because they go from the oldest to the youngest", João added. As João saw it, this set of dolls should not be seen as a growing in size, but in age, moving from who came before to who came afterwards. The five-generation Russian dolls enabled the children participating in the study to establish various relations between them that showed the place they themselves occupied in their family history:

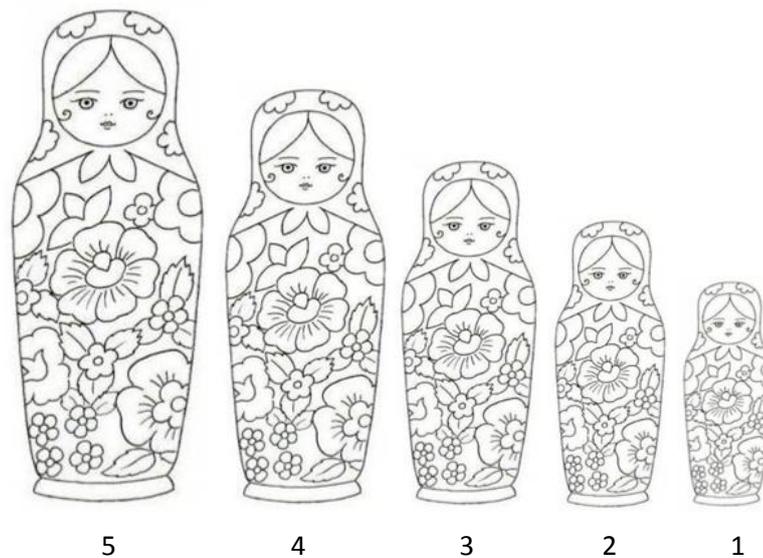


Fig. 39: Set of five Russian dolls.

Alexandre – This is us (1). Then we grow up (points to image 2) and have children (1). Then our children grow up (2) and have children (1) and we become this one (3).

Fernando – Then we become this one (4), because our children grow up (3), our children's children grow up (2) and our children's children's children have children (1). Then we become this (5), because our children become this (4), our children's children become this (3), our children's children's children become this (2) because

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<sup>29</sup> This story is based on the text accompanying a *Matryoshka* bought in Prague. There may be other explanations.



they have children (1). *So this is our children, our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren and our great-great-grandchildren...*

Alex – When we grow up, we'll have children and we'll be like this... (2nd position). Then we'll become like this (3), then like this (4) and then this (5). We change position, grow more, and then become this (2). Then we grow some more until we get to this (3) and then we move position to here (4) until we reach here (5)... *Then we have great-great-grandparents, great-grandparents, grandparents, mother and child.*

The children's perception that they derive from other generations that preceded them (and not just their parents), and that they too will grow up, grow old and come to occupy a different position in the family whenever a new descendent is born, shows the two sides of filiation: the importance of ancestors and the production of descendants (Attias-Donfut & Segalen, 1998). The children recognize that there is a genetic bedrock that unites the generations: "One is the other's mother" (Érica), but "one is also the child of the other" (Catarina), which means that "one was born of the other" (Catarina). It is thus possible to say that "the grandmother is the daughter of a great-grandmother" (Marcelo), "who has a daughter and whose daughter has another daughter" (Alex). There is a chain of continuity between them, based on birth. "It is as if the little girl (1) were in the past and then grew up", Lion said, as if she had aged as she moved through this genealogical scale, tying the generations of the past to those of the future. And with increasing longevity, she not only spends more time in each of her family roles, but also performs a larger number of them simultaneously. Thus, when a new generation comes into the world, she does not lose her existing roles but gains new ones: "We become great-grandparents, but we are still the children of our mothers and fathers and the grandchildren of our grandparents", Leonardo remarks.

The history of generations is a timeframe that is at the same time linear and spiral (Attias-Donfut, 1991). Linear because it flows ineluctably, each individual moving from youth to old age, giving way to new generations: a new generation coming into being as an old one passes away. As new generations replace old ones – even though, with the greater life expectancy, they first succeed one another –, there is a time when they cease to coexist: "This one is going to die and then our great-great-grandmother is no more. Then this one is going to die and we no longer have our great-grandmother", states Fernanda, when she realizes that, as she herself grows old and changes her position on the genealogical scale, so too will her ancestors grow old and die. But generational time is also a spiral. The spiral

symbolizes continuity, the cyclical progress of generations, which not only succeed each other in a linear fashion, but also provide continuity for the cycle of family life, by way of procreation:

Carol – It’s a *cycle*, because, look... if one is inside the other, they are very close, very good friends, they like each other a lot... [...] We are part of a cycle. This one here had children and afterwards they had children and so on...

Baiano – It’s a kind of gear that spins and *links one family to another* at increasing speed.

Betina – This one here (5) had a daughter, who is this one (4); then she got married (4) and had a daughter, who is this one (3); and she got married (3) and had a daughter, who is this one (2) and she got married (2) and had a daughter, who is this one (1). So, this was one generation, this another, this another... and so on... *it doesn’t means it’s going to stop.*

Researcher – And why’s it not going to stop?

Betina – Because people keep *having babies and continuing the family...*

The continuity of the family is also marked by surnames. The act of registering the birth of a child and giving him or her a family name symbolizes inclusion in a network of belonging, the attribution of family status and the transmission of the social and symbolic heritage of the family line. According to Attias-Donfut and Segalen (1998), the emergence of surnames, between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, strengthened intergenerational ties, especially on



Fig.40: One *Matryoshka* within another. An image that leads us to think about the linear and cyclical timeframes that bind generations together.

the father’s side. Although Western Societies recognize both the mother’s and the father’s side of the family, according the same degree of importance to all four grandparents, the exclusive transmission of the father’s surname underlines the symbolic recognition of a single line; and, even though there is greater freedom to adopt the mother’s surname, it is almost always that of the maternal grandfather, thereby maintaining the male-female hierarchy in the transmission of names (Attias-Donfut, 2001). According to Saraceno and Naldini (2001), in a European context, it was the aristocratic classes that first showed concern about fixing the family name, so as to establish a clear system of inheritance, defining the lineage and its stratifications of power. Only later, did the adoption of a surname extend to other social strata, for the purposes of state control and public



administration. A surname gives a child an identity that preserves marks of class and ethnicity for posterity. A surname reveals the origins of the person that bears it.

## 2.1 *The Announcement*

The announcement of the birth of the first grandchild has a special importance in the life of the new grandparents. They often wait eagerly for their offspring to have children and look forward to the day on which the grandchild they wish for becomes reality. In the course of this process – experienced mainly by women, who normally have a stronger urge to be grandmothers –, three distinct phases mark the entry into this new world (Attias-Donfut & Segalen, 1998): the first is the period of anticipation, during which the grandparents project into the future. It is a time full of uncertainties, desires and apprehension, in which the grandparents build up the image of the “child of their dreams”. Still in the realm of imagination, they wish to become grandparents and hope that one day their children will bring them such glad tidings. Just as a child does not choose to be born, the future grandparents likewise do not choose to have grandchildren. In both cases, it is something that happens to them: it is a gift. For the children it is the gift of life; for the grandparents, it is the gift of a new connection between all that which preceded them and everything that will come to pass when they are gone (Kornhaber & Woodward, 1985). But this “gift” must await the decision of the future parents, who, owing to longer years of schooling, professional instability, leaving home late and delaying marriage, often have to put off this moment in their lives, leading many grandparents to “bemoan the fact that children no longer reproduce”, as shown in the research carried out by Attias-Donfut and Segalen (1998, p.12) in France.<sup>30</sup>

The second phase begins when the announcement is made. It is a moment when they have to rethink their own lives and their relations with others. The “child of their dreams” becomes “the imagined child”. The grandparents can now fantasize about how he or she will turn out: their appearance, their name, the ways in which they resemble other members of the family. But it is only with the birth of the “real child” that the grandparents

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<sup>30</sup> In Brazil there has also been some movement in this direction. Although most Brazilian women have their first child between the ages of 20 and 24 years, the number of mothers aged between 25 and 29 grew from 23.7% in 1999 to 25.2% in 2009, and that of those aged between 30 and 34 years increased from 14.4% in 1999 to 16.8% in 2009 (Brazilian Civil Registry Statistics 2009, IBGE, 2010b).



will be truly confronted with this new situation. And it is from this moment on that they begin to establish a new connection between the generations, be it between grandparents and grandchildren, or between parents and children. When they witness the birth of a grandchild, the grandparents relive sensations very close those they experienced with their own children. Especially in the case of the mother-daughter relation, a strong bond is established the moment the new member of the family is born: it is as if the grandmothers were reconstructing their own childbirth through that of their daughters, reinforcing the sense of equality and alliance between them (Lins de Barros, 1987). This moment is special in the lives of grandparents, but also in the lives of grandchildren, who realize that their own birth was a milestone in the life of the family:

Luca – For me, it was a very special moment when I first met Grandma Ladi, when I first saw her... They told me I was really little, but I remember it.  
 Researcher – And why do you think this moment, when you met your grandma when you were very little was so great?  
 Luca – Oh, because I was meeting a family member, *I met my grandma for the first time*, and that is really great!

In the drawing reproduced below, which shows the moment when Luca and his grandmother saw each other for the first time, we can see that he has represented this meeting as something filled with love on both sides: a love which emanates from the grandmother in the direction of the grandson, but also, from the grandson, in the direction of the grandmother. A love that begins at birth, which evokes the biological link that exists between generations and that elicits the “natural instinct” (Kornhaber & Woodward, 1985) for them to bond. For Nanda, her own arrival in the world also represented a milestone in this relation (See image below). Although she is unable to remember the day of her own birth, she



Fig. 41: Drawing by Luca: “A wonderful memory”.

can go back to it through photographs and videotape that record the happiness and the participation of her grandmother in this singular instant of her existence:



Fig.42: Drawing by Nanda: "A wonderful memory".

Nanda – A wonderful memory for me was the day I was born! Because my grandmother was there, took a photo, she loves me... I have a videotape of my birth and my first birthday. Sometimes I look at it... and I can see that my granny was there... [...] I asked my granny about it... she said that it was wonderful, that she was there and took a photo...

However, the announcement of a pregnancy is not always a source of calm for the new grandparents. Their reaction to it depends on the moment at which it occurs. When it happens too early, grandparents may feel unprepared to take on the role, feeling themselves to be "dislocated in time"

(Attias-Donfut & Segalen, 1998) by this. The grandchild arrives really early when they still have small children at home, when they feel very young to occupy this position at a time or when their "peers" are not becoming grandparents, so that it is not something that they can relate to. When the pregnancy occurs in a stressful way, many grandparents may even reject this new role, transferring it onto the great-grandparents (Norris & Tindale, 1994).

The children also recognize that there is an ideal minimum age to be a grandparent. When this event occurs very early in adult life, the role may be confused with that of parents or aunts and uncles, as they do not correspond to the ideal image of a third generation:



Fig. 43: Sequence of images shown to the children during the first meeting.

Fernando [referring to Figure 1] – This one here [48 years], couldn't be a grandfather. He doesn't look like a grandfather! He *looks young!*

Felipe [referring to Figure 3] – This 44-year-old one can't be a grandparent, because he *is a bit too young*: he doesn't have many wrinkles... *He looks like a father*, doesn't he?!

Daniele [referring to Figure 1] – I don't think this one is. Because, at 45, he doesn't look like a grandfather... A grandfather would be a bit older, with more white hair. I think he's not a grandfather, *he looks more like a father than a grandfather.*

Marcelo [referring to Figure 2] – This one's too young [48 years]! *She looks more like an aunt!*

Nanda [referring to Figure 2] – And this one can't be, because she's too young [47 years]...

André [referring to Figure 2] – Yes, she *looks more like a mother...*

Maria [referring to Figure 3] – This one's a bit too young [45 years], so *he must be a father.*

Being a grandparent “before the age of 50” is something out of the ordinary for the children, because many of them have parents that age – almost half of their parents are aged between 41 and 50 years –, which would reveal a mismatch between the ages of these two family positions. However, on thinking about the “time sequence of the happenings”, some children with younger parents realize that their own grandparents may also have taken on this role at a relatively young age:

Lucas – I think that this 50-year-old one is too young to be a grandfather.

Amanda – Not necessarily. Lots of people are grandparents at fifty... My oldest cousin, for example, when she was born, my granny was 50, 51, something like that...

Carol – I think that people can be grandparents younger. Because when my mother had me [at 19-20], I think my granny was 40 something, because now she's 53...

Baiano – My granny's 49. Guess how old my dad was when I was born? Sixteen! But my mum is a bit older than him... she's 31 now.

As the above examples show, having a younger grandparent does not depend exclusively on the age of the grandparents. If it is the children who “present” the grandparents with the gift of a grandchild, this event is also tied to their own age at the time of conception, as Baiano, child of teenage parents, with a maternal grandfather who, had just turned 40 at the time of his birth, explains: “I think that grandparents become grandparents because of their children. This has an influence. If their children have children at 17 or 19, they'll be young grandparents, won't they?!” Becoming a grandparent is thus correlated with the length of time that has elapsed between these two generations becoming parents, which may happen earlier in life, when parents and children first became parents at a relatively young age (with an interval of around 20 years between them), or when their children become teenage parents. Having a larger number of offspring may also



increase the likelihood of becoming a grandparent: “My granny is 49 and she had 8 children by two fathers”, Baiano adds.

Kátia – I think that you can be a grandparent at 48. There are women that get pregnant at 20 or 24 or whatever...

Alice – In the old days, people had children really young, so their children could have children young, at an early age...

Luca – To my mind, you can be a grandparent at any age these days.

Alexandre – I think there are women nowadays who have children really young. “Tati quebra-barraco” became a grandmother at 29!

Researcher – Who is “Tati quebra-barraco”?

Alexandre – She’s that woman...<sup>31</sup> who became a mother at 12 or something, I think!

Catarina – I think that he could be a grandfather [49 years], but he’s only just become a grandfather... He has a little grandson or grand-daughter, a really tiny baby.

Researcher – And why do you think he looks like he’s just become a grandfather?

Catarina – Because he’s not so old...

Adriana – *He could have a teenage daughter and not know yet that he’s going to be a grandfather.*

Catarina – *But quite a young daughter, 19 or 20 years...*

But a grandchild can also arrive “off time”, when he or she comes too late and the grandparents are no longer young enough to have the energy to follow the pace of a small child or profit from their vitality. Ill-health due to advanced age may get in the way of the formation of a relationship from early childhood onwards:

Lion – I think that very old people can be grandparents, but they can’t look after a grandchild, they can’t look after anyone. They can’t stand up for long and so it’s hard for them to take care of anyone...

José – Especially a baby! Babies crawl all over the place and they would have to get up really slow and go after them. And perhaps they wouldn’t manage to!

For the children, this occurs because there are important physiological differences between a younger grandparent and one who is very old, which mean that “the younger grandparent [can] hold the grandchild in their arms, while the older grandparent can’t, because they can’t move around so well”, as Betina puts it.

Becoming a grandparent late in life is a result of a change in the life calendar of the future parents – and often that of the grandparents themselves –, who have put off becoming parents because of other personal projects, such as education or their careers. Although not large, the number of Brazilian women who are choosing to have their first child

<sup>31</sup> Tati-quebra-barraco is a Brazilian funk singer.



between the ages of 40 and 49 has been growing in recent years. They tend to be white women, with more than eight years of schooling, who are economically active (92.5% of them earn the equivalent of more than ten minimum wages) and who now have or had in the past a stable partner. In 1991, there were 7,142 such cases, making up 0.67% of the total number of “first time” mothers in the country; in 2000, this contingent had grown to 9,093 (0.79%), an increase of 26.9% (IBGE, 2010a). Parents at 45, “grandparents at 70+”.

Having grandchildren at an advanced age may also reduce one’s chances of being able actively to accompany their development, thereby providing fewer opportunities for intergenerational contact. Just as grandparents hope to make the most of the time they have with their grandchildren, the latter also wish to enjoy their childhood in the company of grandparents. Children want to grow up alongside their grandparents, with time to play with them, listen to their stories, learn about the past, and teach them things about the present. Thus, the idea of having very elderly grandparents, who are “at death’s door” (Leonardo) or “look like they’re going to die soon” (Pedro) or “quicker” (Diego), often holds little appeal for children. This is not to say that they refuse to accompany their grandparents in their old age. Many even produce a list of relatively positive features of having an elderly grandparent. The preference for younger grandparents has to do with coexistence, the possibility of being able to make the most of the company of their parents’ parents for longer: “I prefer younger grandparents because they will live longer. I don’t mind if they’re old. It’s not that. It’s rather that I want my grandparents to be around longer for me... I never want to be parted from them!” explains Melissa. And even when Alice reminds Melissa that people live longer these days, that “grandparents can live to as old as 120 years”, Melissa points out that, although this is true, it is no guarantee: “Yes, they can. But it’s rare... That’s why I prefer younger grandparents!”.

Having grandchildren late in life, when one is often afflicted by chronic diseases or will die *early* in the life of one’s grandchildren, may also deprive the individuals concerned of the experience of one day passing on all things they want to teach to younger generations and cause them to miss out on the opportunity of reliving and reconstructing their own childhood through that of their grandchildren (Attias-Donfut & Segalen, 1998). The drawing reproduced below shows that the most significant thing Natasha’s grandmother believes she can learn from her granddaughter is precisely this: “I didn’t know what to draw and so I



asked granny. And she said that I teach her the joy of being a child again". Accompanying a grandchild's childhood – surrounded by toys, fantasies, and make-believe – fulfills the important task of symbolically bringing "freshness and joy to old age" (Dolto, 1998b, p. 199). Having grandchildren late in life may prevent both generations from living this process to the full.

## 2.2 A "good age" to be a grandparent?

Just as adults believe there is a "good age" – not too soon, not too late – to become a grandparent (Attias-Donfut & Segalen, 2001a), so do children. This age lies between these two extremes, as João explained during our first meeting: "I prefer

to have a *middle-aged* grandparent, because a middle-aged grandparent isn't too old or too young to be a grandparent, they're *in the middle*". This "good age" clearly varies not only from one historical epoch to another, but also from one society and social class to another, and according to gender, ethnicity and personal preference. The feeling of being "*on-time*" is also subjective and depends on the context of the individual's life. In the case of children, they are also influenced by their own experiences in their viewing of a grandparent being "*on-time*" or "*off-time*" (Neugarten & Weinstein, 1964). When I asked whether they would prefer to have a younger or older grandparent, Alexandra promptly replied: "If I could choose, I wouldn't choose either, because I don't want a granny or grandpa who's very old or too young for me. I would pick one aged 72 or 73 [the age of their actual maternal grandparents], which is *middle-aged*".

Like Alexandra, the children tend to prefer ages nearer to that of their own grandparents when asked to choose the best time of to become a grandparent. However, this range may widen when there are age differences between grandmother and grandfather, as the latter tends to be slightly older than the former and the maternal line slightly younger than the paternal. Generally speaking, as the average age of their



Fig. 44: Drawing by Natasha: "Me teaching my grandparents" ["I teach my grandmother the joy of being a child again"].

grandparents mostly varied from 55 to 70 years, the children think that the “best age” lies somewhere in this range and consider grandparents aged between 45 and 50 to be *very young* (especially when they are reporting their grandparents’ current age – children are aged between 7 and 10 – and not the age of the grandparents when they were born) and those aged over 80 to be *very old*.

According to Baltes, Reese and Lipsitt (1980), throughout our lives, we go through age-graded normative events that affect our perception of the way we perform certain roles or social competences, such as that of being a grandparent. These events may be related to the process of biological development (such as puberty and menopause) or the process of socialization. There is a “right time” – which varies according to the historical and social context – to start school, to start dating, to go to university, to get married, to retire, or to bear a child. Such events are called normative, because they “tend to occur at the same time and last the same length of time for most individuals” (Neri, 2006, p.19), signifying compatibility between age-graded life-stages and an individual’s own life-history and social expectations. When these occur “off time,” i.e. not at the normally expected time of life, they may cause tension and be interpreted negatively by the individuals concerned.

While the first group are “*off time*” because they foster an image that is very similar to that of parents, older grandparents are likewise “*off time*” because they present an image very much like that of great-grandparents. Until quite recently, the coexistence of four generations within a single family was rare and great-grandparents ended their days long before the birth of a first great-grandchild (Attias-Donfut & Segalen, 1998). Hooyman and Kiyak (2001) point out that, in 1900, North Americans aged over 50 had only a 4% chance of having a mother or father who was still alive; this percentage has now gone up to 25%. Europe has seen a similar pattern. Data from the SHARE (*Survey of Health, Aging and Retirement in Europe*) show that, in the countries covered by the study, most people aged between 50 and 59 have at least one surviving parent, and that 40% to 50% of people aged over 80 are part of a four-generation family (Saraceno, 2007). In the drawing below, we can see that Marcelo has even drawn four of his great-parents among his grandparents (Drawing 1, where ‘bisavô’/‘biso’ and ‘bisavó’/‘bisa’ means respectively great-grandfather and great-grandmother), while Felipe has included his maternal great-grandmother in the group of the most important members of his family (Drawing 2, where ‘bisavó’ means great-



grandmother). According to the WHO (2005), the group of people aged over 80 is the one that is growing fastest and centenarians are no longer rare and isolated cases: preliminary data published by the *Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE)* on the 2010 *Census* show that, in Brazil, they already number over 17,000.

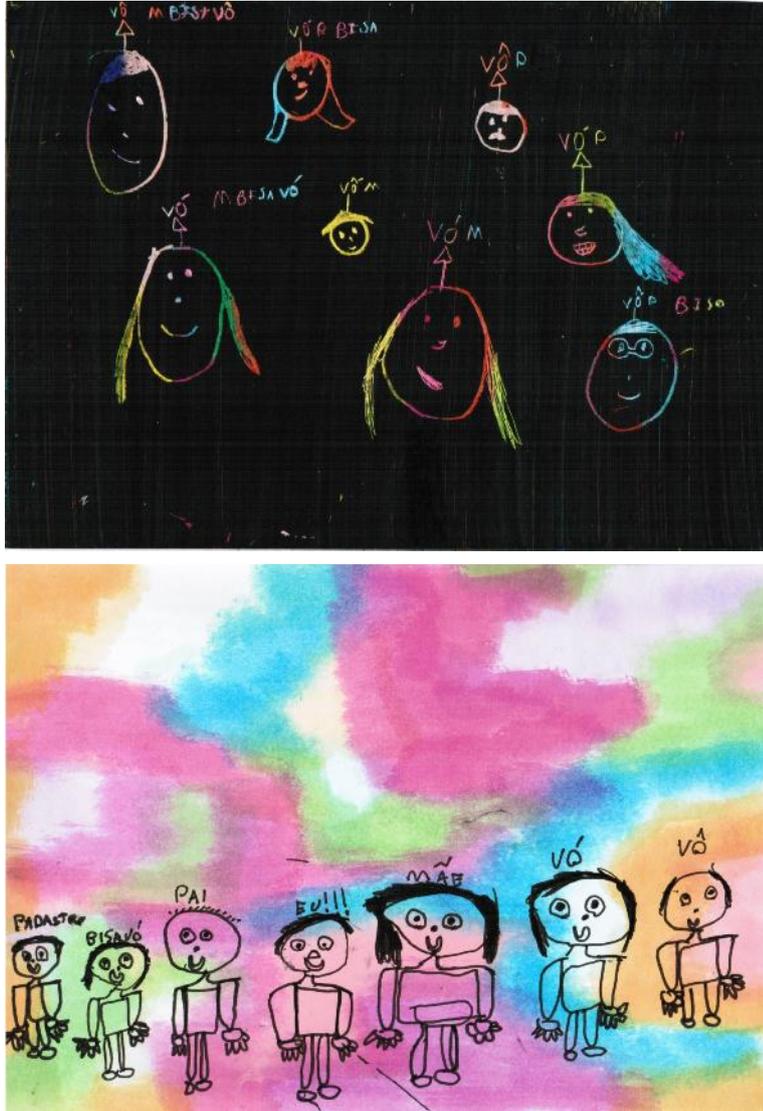


Fig. 45: From top to bottom: Marcelo's drawing of his grandparents and Felipe's drawing of his family, in which we can see the great-grandparents included.

Studies carried out by Attias-Donfut and Segalen (2001b) in France indicate that people tend to become great-grandparents at around 75 years of age among men and 73 years among women. However, great-grandparents have a relatively heterogeneous profile, since their age and state of health can vary greatly, as the children's experience demonstrates:



Diego – I have a great-grandfather who is stone deaf... so I have to shout in his ear. And there's my great-grandmother too. She is fat and likes to sit and eat and watch TV all day with her feet up. She can't walk at all!

André – My great-grandfather's really young... only 85! He does loads of things!

Leonardo – My great-grandmother's already 98. I remember she hurt her legs and had to sit all day in a chair...

Nycolle – I have a great-grandmother who I don't see very often. She's sick with cancer.

Melissa – My great-grandfather and my great-grandmother are both still alive. They live above my grandparents. They are called Cecília and Armelindo. She is 80 something and he's 94 or 95... He has Alzheimer's and can't walk very well. He's in a bad way. My great-grandmother thinks he won't last the year, but she said that last year and he did. I think he's OK. I tell her he'll last to 100!

Marcelo – My great-grandmother is really cool! She's 83 and goes to the beach, goes to the cinema, plays *Wii* and even *Playstation III*!

This more marked presence of the fourth generation in families, along with the new image of grandparents, who are relatively young (especially in a context where people are living longer), still active, in better health and with a better quality of life, means that being a grandparent is more associated with being “middle-aged” than being elderly (Aldous, 1978) – or, at least, more young-elderly than old-elderly –, shifting the image that not long ago belonged to grandparents onto great-grandparents (Dolto, 1998b), when, owing to a shorter life expectancy, and poorer health and economic circumstances, becoming a grandparent was something situated at the end of the life-cycle and strongly associated with old age and death.<sup>32</sup>



Fig. 46: Image shown to the children during our first meeting.

Marcelo [referring to the image on the left] – This one can't be a grandmother [100 years old], because *she looks more like a great-grandmother*.

Nycolle – Yes. She looks more like a *great-granny!* *She's much too old to be a grandmother!*

Researcher – And can't grandparents be really old?

Nycolle – *Not that old!* My great-granny is like that and she is 99!

André [referring to the image on the left] – This one [103 years old] can't be a grandmother, because *she looks like a great-grandmother*.

Nanda – No! A great-great-grandmother.

André – Yes. She's reeeeeally old!

Alex – Because she must have lots of children who have got married and had lots of children...

Nanda – *Yes. She can't be a grandmother. She must be a great-grandmother!*

<sup>32</sup> Although grandparents may be the same age, the living conditions of a person of 50 living in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and one in the 21<sup>st</sup> do not bear comparison, which means that the idea of old age has come to be applied to more advanced ages in the modern world.



Felipe [referring to the image on the right] – I think this one here is too old to be a grandfather [87], *he could be a great-grandfather.*



Fig. 47: Image shown to the children during our first meeting.

When I ask the children when someone becomes a grandparent, Fernando promptly responds: “It’s like this: you’re new-born, born, then you become a baby, then a child, then a teenager, then a grown-up, then an old person and then you die”. Not having understood at what point becoming a grandparent occurs in his description of the cycle of life, I ask him to explain better. “It depends”, he replies. “My grandmother is almost in the final stage... but my grandmother is already really old, she’s 75”. Fernanda then adds: “But my grandmother’s in the middle! In the middle! She’s in her 50s, she’s 55!”. Grandmothers like Fernanda’s, who are in the middle of life and became grandparents when they were still active, long before “third age” and even longer before “fourth age” are now very common, since, as Attias-Donfut and Segalen (2002) point out, many are now becoming grandparents at 48 or 50 years of age. If we look at the fecundity rates in Brazil, we can see that the mean age for women to have a first child has gone down in recent years from 25.6, in 1991, to 24.8 in 2000. This decrease provides evidence that people are having children younger (IBGE, 2005) and that there has been a relative increase in the fecundity rate among women aged between 15 and 19 years (Heilborn & Cabral, 2006). Thus, for many children, old age is associated more with great-grandparents than with grandparents, which makes it impossible to accept old people as grandparents, as Isabela\* illustrates, when she explains why her step-father’s mother couldn’t be her grandmother:

Isabela\* – No. She couldn’t be a granny. *She’s much too old.* She’s much older than my granny Bia [her maternal grandmother] and much, much older than granny Sandra [her paternal grandmother]. *She’s reeeeeeeally old! She’s older than my grandfather who died! So she’s already beyond being a grandmother!*

New grandparents have also changed. They frequently still work or are receiving a good pension and are looking after themselves more – not only in terms of their health, but also their appearance –, they attend programs aimed at their well-being, they travel and are sexually active for longer, and may change partner even at a “quite advanced” age. Clearly,

being more engaged in leisure activities also depends on other factors, such as the time available, financial resources, age, level of education and state of health (Doll, 2007). However, grandparents today seem to be picking up the idea of a “new way of growing old” (Lins de Barros, 2004, p.54), distancing themselves from images of knitting, making jam, and sitting in a rocking-chair: “My grandmother’s a cool person, she goes skateboarding, cycling and surfing!” says André. “Therefore she’s better than the granny in *Hoodwinked!*” (Image below), exclaims Nanda to her classmate.<sup>33</sup>

Adriana – My granny wears a skirt, a dress, and shoes and *they’re always high-heel shoes!*

Érica – What? A granny in high-heels?

Adriana – Why not? She *puts her makeup* on just to go to the restaurant!!!

Érica – My younger grandmother wears makeup too. I love asking... she has *loads of really cool necklaces!*

Baiano – When my mother goes out with my grandmother, they sometimes *only get home in the small hours*, when it’s already daylight! My grandmother goes out at midnight, and comes home in the daylight, with my mother...

Kátia – I love to *travel* with my granny! I like to look at her photos, because *she travels every holiday! She goes to the beach, she recently went to France, she’s been to Spain...* I like to see her photos, I like to hear her stories, I like to see the things she has brought us from other countries. When she went to Peru, she brought me a load of thick coats...

Luca – Grandparents can *look young!* They can have *plastic surgery*, or plaster their faces with *make-up...*

João – Like Madonna. She’s 50 but she doesn’t look it!

José – My granny *dyes her hair*. She won’t show a single white hair! She thinks it looks ugly... So she dyes her hair.

Lion – My granny dyes her hair too. *I don’t even know what color her hair really is!*



Fig. 48: Little Red Riding Hood’s Grandmother in the film, *Hoodwinked!*, snowboarding.

Although grandparents have changed, adopting new lifestyles very different from those of the past, and middle-aged grandparents are becoming common-place, the image associated with them is still firmly that of the “old-elderly” group. Dupont’s study (2009) of the images of grandparents in contemporary children’s literature in Quebec shows that they

<sup>33</sup> Nanda is referring to the film written and directed by Cory Edwards, Todd Edwards and Tony Leech, produced by Europa Filmes in 2005 and launched in Brazil in 2006.



are still full of stereotypes of old age: the men are mostly bald with curly moustaches, while the women are drawn with their hair tied up in a bun. Almost half of the characters wear round spectacles, along with other now uncommon accessories, such as braces, a shawl or a hat with flowers in it. In some cases, the characters may show a certain dandyism, as style that was in fashion in England in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Dupont (2009) illustrates how this stereotypical view of grandparents appears in children's literature by way of a letter written by a child in one of the stories examined: "Looking for a grandmother for a seven-year-old boy. She must be small, very old and have white hair" (p.11).

This image can be found among the children too. Clearly, older grandparents exist and the image that children have of them may vary according to the age, state of health, and lifestyle of their own grandparents. However, we can see that some identity markers for age – such as spectacles, white hair, use of a cane or dentures –, which the children mention so often when describing old people (Ramos, 2006), do not appear so frequently in their descriptions of their own grandparents, showing that there are other sides to this role:

Lucas – Grandmothers carry a handbag, are hunch-backed and use a cane.

Felipe – My grandmother doesn't use a cane!

Alice – Grandmothers usually have white hair.

Melissa – Mine doesn't have white hair!

Alexandre – Grandfathers always have a beret, crutches, and a suit.

Luca – But there are also those that are healthy, who look after themselves!

Pedro – Grandparents can't walk very well, so they stay at home.

Alexandra – Not exactly... my grandpa walks all day!

Betina – They use a cane!

Kátia – Mine doesn't!

José – They wear glasses, those round glasses and they have white hair...

Lion – My granny doesn't have white hair!

### 2.3 *Ages and Styles*

As we have just seen, becoming a grandparent may occur at different stages in life, from very early (around 30 years) to very late (around 75 years), which makes it impossible to assign a single image to this role. With an interval of more than 40 years between one individual and another, not only different expectations, but different living conditions and backgrounds must occur. Even though both are referenced by the same term 'grandparent',

becoming a grandparent is an event that varies from one family to another, since it is not related to age, but to the position in the genealogical tree. Grandparents certainly have a status that results from their position in the order of generations, but this status cannot be identified with a precise role, as Attias-Donfut and Segalen (2001b) point out. The style of interaction that they adopt may vary greatly, from one of engagement with or rejection of the role. In addition to differences among grandparents, one and the same grandparent may adopt various styles in the course of their life. This makes analysis of this relationship somewhat complex.

Many North American studies have mapped the lifestyles of grandparents and their interaction with their grandchildren. One of the most important was that carried out by Neugarten and Weinstein in the 1960s, in which they investigated, among a group of 70 grandparents, with ages ranging from the early 50s to the late 60s, how comfortable they felt with this role, what it meant for the individuals involved and the style they had adopted as grandparents. In this study, Neugarten and Weinstein (1964) identified five predominant styles:

- **Formal style grandparents:** are those who treat their grandchildren in a special way, helping them and making themselves available to care for them on occasions, showing a constant interest. However, there is a clear line between their role and that of their children, and they do not interfere in the parent's decisions.
- **Fun-seeker grandparents:** have an informal and playful relationship with their grandchildren. They break with the relations of authority between the generations and encourage activities from which both they and their grandchildren derive pleasure and enjoyment. The children are seen as a source of leisure for the grandparents, presenting a constant opportunity for self-fulfillment.
- **The Surrogate Parents:** take the place of their children in caring for grandchildren, especially if the real parents work or are unable to take care of them.



- **The Reservoir of Family Wisdom:** These grandparents are concerned to hand down their values and provide their grandchildren with models of behavior. They are more authoritarian figures, maintaining the hierarchical relations between the generations.
- **The Distant Figure:** Such grandparents appear only on holidays or special occasions, such as Christmas, Easter and birthdays. Their contact with their grandchildren is ephemeral and infrequent, which distinguishes them from formal-style grandparents. They are remote figures, essentially far-removed from the lives of their grandchildren, showing little interest in what they do.

The authors also found age and gender differences from one role to the other. In the 1960s, most North American grandparents adopted the formal or distant style, while few were surrogate parents or a reservoir of family wisdom. Among these last two groups, the first were predominantly grandmothers and the second predominantly grandfathers. The study also showed that older grandparents tended to have a more *formal* style, while younger ones were interacted with their grandchildren in a more playful manner. These findings have been corroborated by Roberto (1990).

Although the styles proposed by Neugarten and Weinstein (1964) marked a turning-point in research on grandparents and grandchildren, giving rise to various other studies of the role of grandparents and the way they interact with their grandchildren (Aldous, 1978; Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1985; Roberto, 1990; Roberto & Stroes, 1995), the relationships between them are much more dynamic and fluid than their classification of styles would lead us to believe. There is a very fine line between the categories, which the grandparents cross – not necessarily in a linear fashion, but also in parallel and simultaneously – over time, showing a wide variety of forms of behavior in their time as grandparents. These do not vary only in relation to gender or age itself, but also, in relation to the age of the grandchildren, state of health, personal preference, geographical distance, the side of the family they come from, and the circumstances of the families of which they are members. The same grandparent may, thus, show very different sides, depending on which grandchild they are dealing with.

Grandparents deemed to be “distant” may, for example, meet their grandchildren only on festive occasions because geographical distance or economic hardship prevents them from doing so more often, but this does not mean, necessarily, that they have no interest in their grandchildren’s lives. These same grandparents may even care for another grandchild on a daily basis, while their daughter works, playing, in this other context, the role of surrogate parents. Likewise, the transmission of values, and the family history and heritage, does not necessarily have to be carried out by authoritarian grandparents, as this could just as well be done by a formal-style or fun-seeking grandparent. Thus, however interesting these typologies may be, they cannot account for the diversity of relations between grandparents and grandchildren, reducing the forms of behavior and interaction that exist between them to static, clear-cut categories.

Greater life expectancy is another factor that has given rise to a multiplication in the styles adopted by grandparents. Nowadays, they not only have the opportunity to see their grandchildren born and growing up, but also to watch them become adults, and, not infrequently, parents themselves. In the course of this extended period of coexistence, grandparents may come to have a different meaning in the lives of their grandchildren, changing the way they interact, or even the frequency of contact, according to whether the grandchildren are children, teenagers, or adults. An individual may be a grandparent for a whole family life-cycle, and his or her role will be redrawn with every change to a different constellation. Generally speaking, the ties between these two generations are strongest in childhood, when grandparents more often take care of their grandchildren, and spend weekends or school holidays with them (Hooyman & Kiyak, 2001). As time goes by, contact tends to be sparser. In adolescence, apart from the fact that the grandparents do not need to look after their grandchildren any more, the interests of the grandchildren also change: they leave home to study, date, go out with friends and establish new ties outside the family.

According to Geurts (2009), there are two main reasons for the change in the type of interaction between grandparents and grandchildren at the start of adult life. One concerns who takes the initiative to make contact, which shifts from parents and grandparents to the grandchildren themselves. During childhood and early adolescence, parents are the strongest link between these two generations, because they arrange opportunities for



contact between them. When grandchildren enter adulthood, the influence of their parents tends to decline and the grandchildren may now establish ties of their own free will. However, opportunities to contact their grandparents tend to diminish over time. On the one hand, there is the preference for relations with people one's own age; on the other, time in much shorter supply, and most devoted to personal job- or family-related projects.

However, if on the one hand, this relation changes as the grandchildren grow up, it also changes as the grandparents themselves age. There are, in fact, three phases of grandparenthood (Attias-Donfut & Segalen, 1998; 2001a). In the first fifteen years (or a little more for those who became grandparents when still young), the grandparents are still working hard, dividing their time between their work, their grown-up children, and carrying for their grandchildren or elderly parents. In addition, social and political activity seems to culminate at a certain age, so that men and women lead a multifaceted life, juggling many different roles, which are not often easy to reconcile with one another. For Felipe, this is a difficult period, because the grandparents "have to work and, if they have to do more things, they may get frustrated" with their performance, spreading their fatigue to other generations: "Yes... he goes to work, gets stuck in the traffic, gets stressed out because work is annoying sometimes, and when he comes home he gets stuck in a traffic jam, and starts sounding his horn, shouting '*Get a move on!*'", which means that he arrives home "tired, and stressed out by work without much time to have fun" (Amanda). "So we start talking, trying to start a conversation with them and they say '*Shut up!*'", Amanda explains. When they retire, in the second phase of grandparenthood, work is not so overbearing, and grandparents can "talk more, because they are lonelier" and "only have the bills to pay" (Felipe).

In this phase, recently retired grandparents, almost always "young elderly people", still enjoy full health, and, although they may still be involved in many activities at the same time, such as caring for their elderly parents, helping out their adult children and caring for grandchildren, as well as sports, clubs and "the demanding leisure activities provided by old age pensioner programs" (Britto da Motta, 2004, p.4), the end of working life makes more time available, allowing them to see their grandchildren more, whether they are still children or teenagers. This phase is often accompanied by the birth of a new generation, which renews the family line, and allows them to live this role more fully, especially when the

second generation was relatively large. In the third phase, the grandparents, who are already “old elderly people” see the little ones they are no longer able to cradle in their arms grow up to be adults (Attias-Donfut & Segalen, 1998). Often they become great-grandchildren, seeing their own children become grandparents, and their grandchildren parents.

The passage through these different stages can be illustrated by the conversation between Fernanda and Fernando that occurred during one of our meetings, when they were discussing the different ages of grandparents, using the four images of men shown them:

Fernanda – But there are young grandfathers!

Fernando – Yes, but not 48 years old!

Researcher – So how old can they be?

Fernando – 50 plus! Fernanda’s grandmother’s 55!

Fernanda – So, if he’s fifty, he’s in the grandfather’s group...

Fernando – So, he’s in the first *years* of being a grandfather.

Fernanda – And this one here’s in the *third years* [80 years old] and this one in the *fourth years* [92 years old]!

Researcher – What do you mean by the *first years* of being a grandfather?

Fernanda – *When the grandchildren are really little, like two years old, and these here have older grandchildren...*

In this dialogue, we can see that Fernanda does not mention the “second years” of grandparenthood, skipping directly from the “first years” to what she calls the “third” and “fourth years”. As they have assigned two of the higher ages to the images under discussion (80 and 92 years), and judged none to be in their 60s or 70s, she may have skipped the second phase because she believed that none of the images corresponded to this group, which shows a heterogeneous and diverse perception of different stages of old age. Likewise, these *years* express different phases in grandparenthood, since the grandfather aged 50 years would be in the first years of being a grandparent because he has very young grandchildren, and the others would be in the third or fourth years because they already have older grandchildren.

From one phase to another, grandparents age visibly and this can be seen in the marks left by time, which makes their skin become “wrinkled” (Érica), and “full of blotches” (André) and their “cheeks sag” (Diego). The body changes: “the breasts shrivel and sag” (Baiano), becoming “droopy” (Felipe) and some develop “hunched backs” (Nanda). “We can see”, Yasmin tells us, because “their hair goes white and they get weaker” and “you can see the veins when people get older” (Alice). Their eyesight also begins to flag, “because, when people get older, they will probably need to wear glasses” (Alice) and their sense of hot and



cold is not what it used to be, since “even though it is hot, they [grandmothers] have to wear woolies because they feel cold” (Alexandre), and this is why “they use those long skirts, so they don’t get goose-pimples on their legs” (Érica).

Human ageing is an inevitable process, characterized by a combination of ontogenetic changes that accompany us from birth to death. From a biological point of view, these changes are *deleterious* (they reduce functionality), *progressive* (they emerge gradually), *intrinsic* (they are not the result of any modifiable environmental factor, even though the environment is an important factor) and *universal* (members of the same species exhibit these characteristics as they grow older, taking into account social, economic, environmental, and genetic factors and so forth) (Jeckel-Neto & Cunha, 2006). If the body *metamorphoses* with age, as de Beauvoir (1990, p.12) put it, and elderly grandparents no longer have the same vigor and energy they once did, their way of interacting with their grandchildren also tends to change, along with the new pace of life imposed by advancing age:

Carol – I think that, if you have a younger granny, you can play with her more, because she’s more willing... If you have an older granny, she’s less willing and you have to be careful when you hug her so as not to crush her...

Baiano – A young granny can play, an old granny might put her back out...

Felipe – And old grandpa can’t run in the street. A young grandpa can ride a bicycle and spend time with you...

Lucas – Yes. He can be there with his twisted fingers, one on top of the other, so he can’t walk, like my granny.

Alexandre – An old granny can’t, like, play volleyball with you. With a younger granny I can play ball and things...

Alexandra – The difference is like this as I see it: the young grandfather can work out, stand on his head, all that kind of thing... The old one just does this [she raises her arm to demonstrate] and his back hurts.

Pedro – If the older one stood on his head, his back would break; he’d be all beaten up...

Alexandra – And his dentures would fall out! A young grandfather doesn’t wear dentures!

Alexandre – I think that there’s a little bit of a difference [between having a younger grandfather and having an older one], because the younger one can do a few more things than an older one. Like: he can walk a bit more and he can run with you on the beach; and he can go cycling with you.

Érica – And an old grandfather can’t do much with you because he’s done in, he’s an old man...

Catarina – He does simpler things, like... I don't know! Like going to the newsagents to buy a newspaper, stuff like that...

Adriana – Like: he can't sit on the floor; he has difficulty putting on shoes...

Érica – And I think that his house is much quieter...

Ageing is also a normative biological process graded by age (Baltes et al., 1980), which tends to be easily correlated with a large number of losses: loss of beauty, of capabilities, of power, or strength, of work, of status, of peers. It is very true that important losses occur in old age – the children listed various kinds in the examples cited above –, but it is equally true that there are some gains (Py, 2004). Traditionally, gerontologists defined ageing as a process of decline, since gains appeared to occur only during biological maturation, including childhood and the beginning of adult life (which can easily be represented as an inverted U shape). However, if we view the course of life as a process of continuous development, we can see that losses and gains occur throughout the existence of an individual and that one of the greatest losses occurs at the moment of birth, when we leave the “paradise” of the womb. However, this is not to say that the balance of gains and losses is the same in childhood as it is in old age. The proportion is related to age, and evidence shows that the number of gains diminishes with advancing years, while the number of losses increases (Baltes, 1987).

Throughout this interplay, the individual goes through a constant process of adaptation that shifts the field of possibilities according to what has been lost or gained. According to Baltes (1987), in harmonious development, the individual needs to learn to manage the biological, psychological, and social changes that occur throughout life, allocating his or her inner (personal) and outer (environmental) resources and regulating the balance of losses and gains. To explain this adaptation process, Baltes and Baltes (1990) have put forward a model of selection, optimization, and compensation – known as the SOC model – which is supposed to be carried out using three strategies: a) the individual *selects* his or her goals and puts them in order of importance, restructuring and rearranging them each time a new choice or a new loss occurs; b) to better direct one's energies towards the chosen objectives, the individual must *optimize* his or her resources and c) he or she must *compensate* for certain losses by finding alternatives that allow them to continue functioning. “This means that the losses, although irreversible, do not necessarily signal an end, since they can always generate new gains.” (Py, 2004, p.123).



When grandparents age or are debilitated by disease, both they and their grandchildren need to come up with adaptation strategies to minimize some of the losses caused by age. If, on the one hand, grandparents themselves need to change the meaning of their role as the years go by, since fatigue and pain no longer permit them to play with their grandchildren as they would like, on the other hand, the grandchildren need to adapt their desires and expectations to the new reality of their grandparents. They need to create a system of compensation that generates new strategies for interaction, so that the grandparents, even though debilitated, can remain an active presence in the lives of their grandchildren:

Nycolle – With a younger granny we could go for a walk, go to the cinema, but with an older granny we would have to go by car, and we wouldn't be able to get out and walk to places...

Marcelo – *There's a way* of making her walk! We'd just have to carry her or take her in a wheelchair!

Catarina – The younger ones are more willing to run, and exercise... And the older ones would take us for a walk, to have an ice-cream, *to a place where they don't have* to exert themselves too much...

Baiano – With an older grandparent, you can't run, *but you can play draughts, or chess...*

Lion – With an older granny, you can talk. *You can't play much, but you can talk.*

José – Tell jokes, make her laugh...

Alice – I think that grandparents gradually lose their energy; they're less interested in walking and stuff. *But they can look after us at home*, when our mother is traveling or when our father has a meeting and things like that... My granny, for instance, doesn't go cycling or running with me, but my father does this. He goes cycling with me every Sunday, even when it's 30 degrees out...

For some children, the fact that their grandparents no longer have the same physical capacity is not even a problem, because they do not necessarily prefer more physical games, as Fernanda explains: "This older grandfather can play cards with us or board games... *I myself prefer* to play cards and board games rather than run about", and there are some gains that only occur (or improve) with age: "I would prefer to have an older grandfather, because it's cooler, he's lonely. Old people are normally lonely and miss the day when they could walk, run and ride a bike. So *they like to talk* to people, tell stories, because they can't do these things anymore..." (Felipe) and he could "*tell me lots of stories* about when he was a child, because *I love it* when my mother does this" (Amanda). "Older grandparents can also

*teach us lots of things, because they have more life experience, they are older and know things from the old days that we don't hear people talk about much these days...*" (Kátia).

In their statements, the children show that their grandparents can, even at an advanced age, be partners with much experience and many things to teach them, and that, even though the range of things they have in common may tend to diminish, such common interests will not necessarily disappear completely. The ties that bind them are much stronger than any of the possible limitations of age, and though some studies have shown that children have a less than positive view of old age (Page et al., 1981; Ramos, 2006; Seefeldt & Keawkungwal, 1986), where elderly grandparents are concerned, the affection they have for them would seem to outweigh this. While "an old person" is someone who does not have a direct relation with children, which highlights only the loss, an "old grandparent" is someone who occupies a special place in their existence, someone for whom the child holds a special affection from a tender age. Thus, instead of children interpreting the signs of old age as negative features (Ramos, 2006), they are able to see in these same features the beauty of the marks of time – "A grandmother is a lovely thing!", Felipe says; "My granny is lovely [71 years] because she does herself up very elegantly", Catarina adds – and are able to see the body of an old person as a source of fun: "I pull my granny's sleeves and play with her sagging skin. It's cool!" Diego says. Fernanda also used to play this game with her great-grandmother: "My great-grandmother died at the age of 98. She had so many wrinkles! She was full of sagging skin under her arm and I liked to play with it while I watched TV. It was really nice! She didn't even mind! She thought it was funny!", relates Fernanda.

Pedro tells us that "age doesn't matter; what matters is the person", because what stimulates this choice is not whether the grandparent is young or old but "what we feel for him or her" (Natasha). "I would choose either one out of love", Alexandre claims. One should remember that "all grandparents are going to get old one day", Melissa tells us, and that the love and affection felt for them outweigh the simple fact that they are getting old: "Even if she couldn't play, I would stop playing to look after her... if she was my grandmother, what do you think! I would stop playing and look after her!" (João). As Dolto (1998b) puts it, "there is a biological life from infancy to adulthood and old age, but there is also a life of the heart, and a spiritual life, that is quite another matter" (p.187).



## 2.4 Gender and Style

But it is not only age that interferes in the kind of relationship that pertains between grandparents and grandchildren. Gender is another important variable, which manifests itself in three different ways: in the relations between grandmothers and grandfathers and their grandchildren; in the relations between grandsons and grand-daughters and their grandparents and in the differences between the mother's and the father's side of the family (Spitze & Ward, 1998). For the children, there are differences between grandmothers and grandfathers that are biological givens – “Grandmother is female and grandfather is male” (Fernanda); “one is a boy and the other's a girl” (Amanda); “one is a man and the other's a woman” (Lucas); “one's a gentleman and one's a lady” (Amanda); “one's male and one's female” (João) – and these differences are visible in physical bodily characteristics: “Grandfathers are taller because men are almost always taller than women” (Daniele); “grandpa is bald, but grandma isn't” (André); “his voice is gruffer” (Érica) and “granny wears make-up and grandpa shaves” (Adriana). This is why two words are needed to distinguish one from the other: “The word granny and grandpa are different. They sound different. There's a difference”, José remarks.

But the differences are not restricted to physical or linguistic ones. As Fernanda puts it, “they also have *very different habits*”, visible not only in the way they interact with their grandchildren, but also, in the gender roles that they play as men and women. When Lucas says that “grandpa does men's things, and grandma does women's things” he is pointing to precisely this aspect. But what does doing men's things and doing women's things mean? How are grandmothers and grandfathers different? In what ways are they similar? How do grandchildren perceive this?

The children note that the space of the home is much more the domain of the grandmother and that she normally does the cooking, “washing and cleaning” (Alice). Some grandfathers may like to cook, as Daniele's grandfather does, who, as she puts it, is “addicted to food”, or Kátia's, “who cooks very well” and makes fish “with a crispy batter”. However, most grandparents are less domesticated: “My grandfather doesn't even know how to make a sandwich. *My granny does everything* and I help her”, Diego tells us. André has also noticed this: “My grandpa *orders my grandma* to bring him food. He sits reading the newspaper and calls out for her to bring him a pudding or something!”. “Yes”, says Érica,

“grandpa is much *lazier than grandma*, because father is lazy and so grandpa is even lazier. Mine spends all day sleeping!”. “Like mine”, Adriana adds, “*it’s my grandma who has to get up early*”.

The image that many children have of their grandparents is of a man who “sits doing nothing but watch television and eat” (Pedro) even “showing his belly button” (Maria). For Alice, men “stay at home, sitting on the couch, while women do the housework”. Grandmothers, whether they are working or retired, continue to be very active in the home, often continuing to perform the tasks that they did when they were wives and mothers. “I’ve also noticed this”, says Melissa, “because my grandpa helps with the food and helps a lot, but afterwards, before lunch, when my grandmother is finishing the cooking, he lies down in bed reading, just waiting”. Marriage does not give rise only to a shared life, but also to a “division of labor, space, skills, values and the personal vocations of men and women” (Saraceno & Naldini, 2001, p.12). Although a few grandfathers, like Melissa’s, help with housework, the time spent on this by men and women varies greatly. According to data produced by the Brazilian Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA), while Brazilian women spent an average of 25 hours per week on housework in 2008, the figure for men was only ten hours (Fontoura & Gonzalez, 2009).

Women have always been more involved in childcare and housework. The *Parsonian* model, which projected an image of the nuclear family as a “happy family”, also promoted a strong division of labor according to gender, supposedly complementary, to ensure family harmony: “the man should be the breadwinner and devote himself to that as much as possible. That’s the father’s job. The woman should stay at home to provide a comfortable environment, to look after the children and her husband” (Singly, 2000, p.15). The “happy family” is supposed to enable each of its members to be happy. Many of these grandmothers were probably socialized by a system with a strict division of labor according to gender. However, they have also lived through and taken part in revolutionary events, such as the development of the chemical and mechanical contraception, feminist protests, criticisms of the role of the woman as home-maker, the massive increase in the numbers of women in the employment market, and the struggle for more egalitarian kinds of marriage, which have pushed the father off the pedestal of the *pater familias*. Despite having lived through such things, many erstwhile mothers, who are now grandmothers, continue to take



responsibility for the majority of the domestic chores and this can clearly be seen in the children's testimony.

As Araújo and Scalón (2005) point out, gender relations are permeated by power relations. While it has become acceptable for women to have a public role, and this has become increasingly important over the years, this has not led men to play a larger role in the home. According to these researchers, longitudinal studies show that there has been a slight increase in the participation of men in housework, while there has been a correspondingly slight decrease in the participation of women. However, this is a very gradual process, suggesting that there is more continuity than change in the sexual division of domestic labor. Saraceno and Naldini (2001) also note that the reduction in the participation of women is due more to changes in lifestyle – with the emergence of the dishwasher, the microwave oven, the washing-machine, the spin-dryer and the vacuum cleaner –, which have helped reduce the time spent on these activities than on any more equitable division of labor with their spouses.

The participation of men in housework is greater among those with higher levels of education and participation tends to increase when men retire, increasing from ten to thirteen hours per week. However, women over sixty still spend around 28.7 hours a week on housework, and this figure rises to 31 hours a week among those aged between 50 and 59 years (IBGE, 2007). As we can see, although grandfathers do housework, this is almost always done by women, who take in charge most of it. It is clear that this decision, as to “who does what”, is not only determined by gender relations but also by family relations and the dynamic of balancing productive and domestic work. However, often “women end up doing housework, even though they don't like it or don't want to spend their time on it, as if they [had internalized] a duty to perform these tasks” (Torres, 2001, p.58).

Domestic work also includes childcare, and, just as mothers tend to care for children more, so grandmothers tend to look after grandchildren more. Grandfathers, although they contribute more than when they were fathers, tend to perform more auxiliary or parallel tasks, helping their grandchildren outside the home on the threshold between the public and the private sphere: “My grandfather likes to pick me up from school” and “mine takes me to school”, Diego and Alexandra reveal. As Araújo and Scalón (2005) point out, the “association between childcare and women is a question of gender”, since, with the

exception of gestation, “all other aspects of childcare could just as easily be carried out by men or women” (Araújo & Scalon, 2005, p.48). However, as Érica observes, “grandma looks after me much more than grandpa”. In the following examples, we can see some childcare situations as drawn or described by the children, in which they provide evidence of the central role of their grandmothers in this:



Fig. 49: Drawing by Leonardo. He explains the drawing as follows – “My granny helps me with my homework whenever there’s homework. I sometimes go to her house, but she sometimes comes to ours”.



Fig. 50: Drawing by Alexandra. She explains the drawing as follows – “When I hurt myself, my granny always helps me: she puts ice on it, gives me a medicine I don’t remember the name of, puts a plaster on and makes me stay in bed all day”.



Fig. 51: Drawing by Luca. He explains the drawing as follows – “When I’m sick, my granny looks after me”.

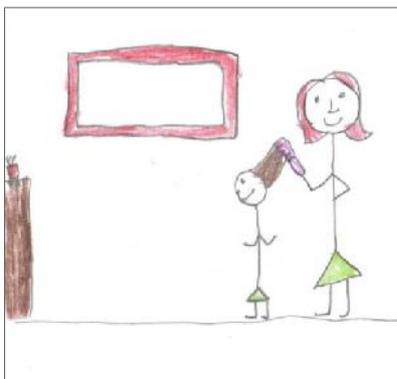


Fig. 52: Drawing by Gabriella. She explains the drawing as follows – “I learnt to brush my hair from my granny”.

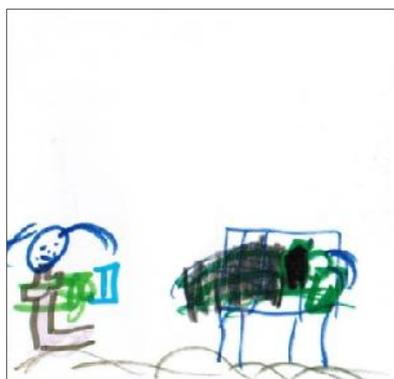


Fig. 53: Drawing by Maria. She explains the drawing as follows – “My granny tells me stories in bed”.



Fig. 54: Drawing by Fernanda. She explains the drawing as follows – “My granny helps me with my multiplication table”.

Daniele – *My granny first taught me to walk.* I have a photo album where you can see. I was in the front yard. I was holding onto the table and my grandmother was making me walk.

Baiano – *My granny taught me to eat by myself.*



Érica – *My granny taught me to tie my shoelaces.* I was tying a simple knot and she came and told me that she would like to teach me how to tie a bow, and I let her and she taught me!

When talking about everyday interactions, the children mention their grandfathers much less than their grandmothers. They care for them less and are less involved in house- and homework, although many have the job of dropping them off and picking them up from school: “grandpa plays less and grandma plays a bit more” (Luca) and “occasionally grandpa is a bit more strict than grandma” (Lion), and may be “aggressive” (Pedro), “angry and complaining” (Maria). The children are also clearly cognizant of gender differences when it comes to dealing with children:

Alexandra [on her maternal grandparents] – Sometimes, my grandpa, how can I put it... I don't want to show him any disrespect, *but my grandma talks to me and cares for me all day, while he sits in front of the TV eating...* So I talk more to grandma, *she shows more consideration for me, she cares more...*

Érica [on her maternal grandparents] – *My grandfather hardly ever speaks to me, not even on the telephone, because he is always talking to my father. But my grandmother plays with me, turns on the TV for me, does loads of stuff with me...*

The lower level of involvement of grandfathers in the lives of their grandchildren also has historical roots. The very notion of “grandparents” would appear to be a quite recent concept, entering the European language only in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Before this, grandparents were referred to merely as ancestors, without any particular role to play in the family. When they appear in biographies or works of art, they are seen as elderly people who form part of the family, but who do not have any role to play or any intimacy with their grandchildren (Keck & Saraceno, 2009). There is not much historical evidence regarding grandparents from the Middle Ages or the Renaissance. As Attias-Donfut and Segalen (1998) point out, “historical demography does not allow us to ascertain with any degree of precision the number of grandparents who existed in ancient times” (p.27). However, this does not mean that they did not exist, but that they did not appear in the records. It was only in modern times, that “old people” came to be “grandparents”, taking on a new role in the family.

According to Chvojka (2003), the “invention of grandparenthood” went hand in hand with the “invention of childhood”, and was molded by the bourgeois family ideal of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when life expectancy spiked, the age at which women married decreased



and, as Ariès (1981) put it, a new awareness of the specific nature of childhood emerged, with a “new feeling of childhood”. However, the creation of this new position seems to have been mostly for women. According to Chvojka (2003), this role does not appear as something related to men until the end of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when grandfathers are practically non-existent in European paintings, engravings and book illustrations. In F. Leiber’s iconographic representations of “the stages of life”, for example – *Das Stufenalter des Mannes* and *Das Stufenalter der Frau*, both from 1900 –, we can see that, while children appear throughout almost the whole cycle of women’s lives, first as daughters and then as grand-daughters, they only appear once in the life-cycle of men, when they become fathers; and, even so, they are being cared for by women.



Fig. 55: Leiber, F.: *Das Stufenalter des Mannes*, ed. Gustav May Söhne. (Frankfurt/Main). Colored woodcut, 1900.

In the case of women (as we can see from the image below), motherhood occurs in the third stage. In the fourth she becomes a mother-in-law and, at fifty, a grandmother, with “a grandchild to make her happy”: “ein Enkel sie jetzt glücklich macht” is written under the step that portrays the mother, the grandmother and the newborn in a crib. So far as age is



concerned, it is also interesting to note that this event occurs at exactly the mid-point in life: not too soon, not too late. It is clear that the steps represent an idealized view of the life cycle, since they go from birth to 100 years, at a time in history when life expectancy was not normally so high. However, we can see that intergenerational contact accompanies grandmothers into the final stages of their old age, at which point the grandmother is depicted alone awaiting death.



Fig.56: Leiber, F.: *Das Stufenalter der Frau*, ed. Gustav May Söhne. (Frankfurt/Main). Colored woodcut, 1900.

When grandfathers are involved more with their grandchildren, it is usually not in everyday care, but in games that they set up for the little ones, which are usually lively and fun, leading the children to describe them as playful and good fun. “My [maternal] grandfather is *good fun* and my granny is cool”, Felipe says. Amanda remembers what she and her grandfather most like to do together: which is play. “My grandpa is *really fun* to be with, we pretend to do martial arts, and my granny is very patient with me... We love to play martial arts, but I always win! Hahahahahaha!” (Amanda). Amanda’s drawing in orange (See below), shows that she portrays her grandfather in a highly expressive fashion, with a broad



smile. For her, her grandfather is “sweet, a really nice person, because he plays with me, laughs with me, dances with me, my grandfather is precious!”. “When I think of him, I think



Fig. 57: Amanda's portrait of her grandfather.

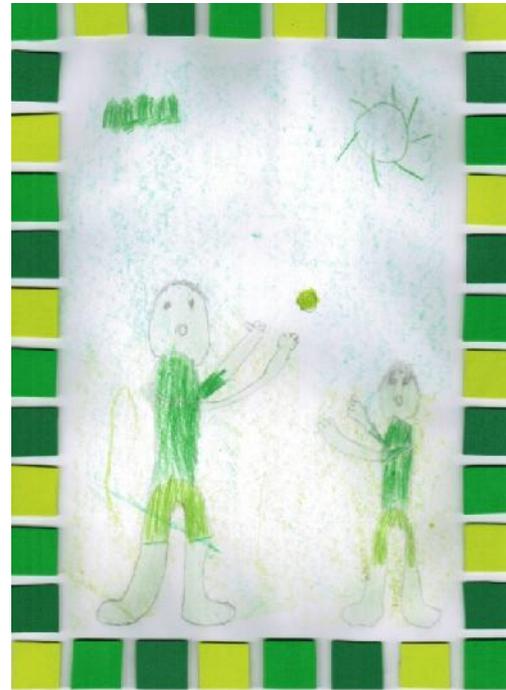


Fig. 58: Diego's portrait of his grandfather.

of having fun, being happy, and, especially, misbehaving!” she adds. Diego also provides an image of a more relaxed grandfather: “I love my [paternal] grandfather, because he is *great fun* and, when I do something wrong, dad is angry with both of us!”, the boy explains. The image, in green, below depicts them playing. A grandfather who is more than a grandfather, “a good friend and a partner in crime”.

In these two cases, we can see that the men are clearly engaged in their new role as grandfathers. And although it is not as significant as that of the women, it should not be disregarded. With the decline in the patriarchal model of the family, space has been opened for men also to express their affection more freely. As Attias-Donfut (2001) puts it, “after massive changes in the role of fathers, it is time for grandfathers to build up a new role in the family” (p.48), and some children can show us what this new role looks like. For Érica, her paternal grandfather is a “fun and loving person”, which makes her feel “very close to him”. All of this affection can be clearly seen in her drawing reproduced below, which shows two halves of a heart “joined to make one,” as the little girl put it. Her grandfather teaches her “how to have fun”, “trekking in the forest, which makes us feel good and scares us a bit”, she says. Fun is also a strong point with Kátia's grandfather: “I like my [maternal]



grandfather a lot, because *we have such fun!* *We have such fun*, he teaches me so many things, and I teach him lots of things and I love to cook with him now and then”.

It is clear that children value these interactions, mainly because the activities grandmothers and grandfathers have to offer are different. However the fact that the grandfather “is just funny” and doesn’t take on any childcare responsibilities is not always seen by the children as something positive. Betina, for example, says that she sometimes argues with her grandfather, because “he doesn’t take anything seriously” and

can’t distinguish between situations where his “jokes can help with the pain” from those where the joke has a mocking tone. “That’s not on”, says Betina, referring to a day when her

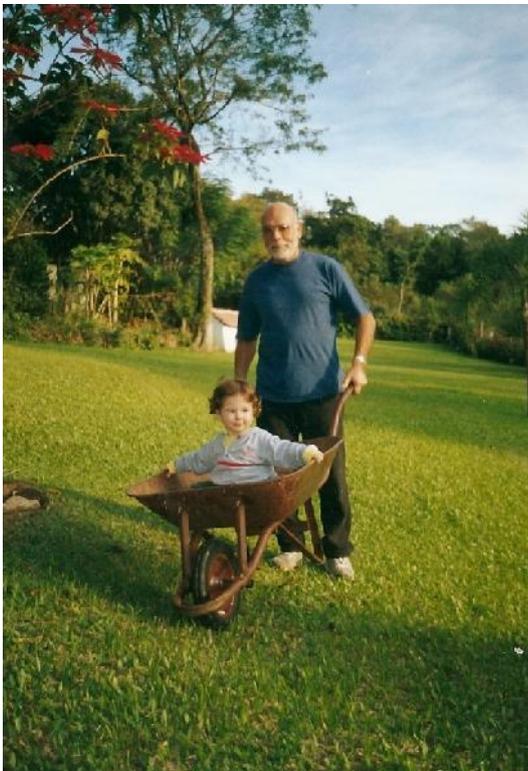


Fig. 60: Kátia, when she was little, having fun with her maternal grandfather. We can see that this is quite a lively activity, as she is holding onto the sides of the wheel-barrow.



Fig. 59: Érica’s drawing.

grandfather made a joke about the death of her puppy. For Alexandra, having a fun grandfather is something very special. However, she can see that her grandmother is much more concerned for her well-being than her grandfather, because, while her grandmother “insists that I must eat, grandpa just sticks his tongue out. He just clowns around saying: *‘Eat or I’ll come and get you’*”.

Alexandra – “When he’s not sticking out his tongue and when he’s not clowning around, he’s quite cool. He’ll do anything. If I ask my granny for a hotdog, she’ll give me broccoli, but not my grandpa. He gives me what I want. And if I ask him one this size [small], he gives me an enormous one! *He does everything I want*, he is kind and that. Sometimes he is even better than granny”.

Alexandra has lunch at her grandparents’ practically every day. The drawing reproduced here (See drawing below) portrays one of these



moments: it shows her grandmother teaching her “to eat her greens”. Her grandfather, as she said, is less concerned about his, giving her everything she asks for. While the grandmother “takes care”, the grandfather plays or gives her what she wants. It is the same with André. He says that his grandmother controls the number of times he can go to McDonald’s (See drawing below) – which drives him mad –, but his grandfather is somewhat more permissive: “I teach my grandparents to eat junk food. They really hate it! They never want to eat junk food. But I insist! *My grandpa eats it, but my grandma, never*”.



Fig. 61: Drawing by Alexandra: “Learning with my grandparents”.

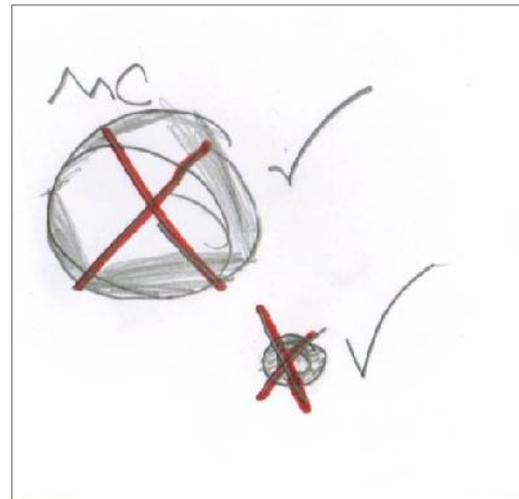


Fig. 62: Drawing by André: “A sad memory”.

Clearly, the children refer more to grandmothers not only because they take care of the children more. Divorce in the third generation and the greater longevity of women also contribute to the grandchildren having more contact with their grandmothers than with their grandfathers. Of the 36 children interviewed, 19 had at least one deceased grandparents, giving a total of 34 deaths. Of these, 29 were grandfathers, which means that many of them have a strongly gender-based intergenerational experience, as the following statements by Catarina, Luca and Jaqueline reveal.

Catarina – I think that grandfathers have a different way of caring. I think they do different things.

Researcher – What kind of different things?

Catarina – I don’t know! *I don’t have one!*

Luca – I drew this [picture reproduced below] because *all of my grandfathers are already dead and I never knew them*. This makes me very sad.

Jaqueline – My saddest memory is of when my grandpa died. It is even sadder, because both my grandfathers died, not just one. It’s sad, because you can’t say ‘*Hey grandpa! Come here!*’ I never used the word “grandpa”!



This is why, in Alice's drawing of her grandparents (below) her grandmother appears alone, taking up the whole page:

Alice – I can only draw one person! Just one!!! I don't think I ever met any of my other grandparents. I've seen the videotape of my first birthday party and I didn't see any of the other three. So I don't think I ever met them!

The longevity of women can be explained by a number of factors: a) better medical and obstetric care for women means that death in childbirth, which once was common, is now relatively rare; b) women are also more concerned about their health and use health services more often; c) women and men have different levels of exposure to risks such as household

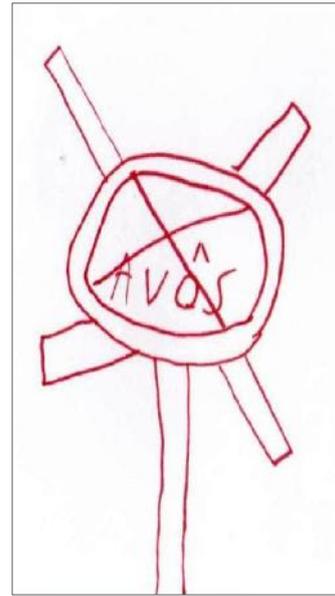


Fig. 63: Drawing by Luca: "A sad memory". He drew a 'x' on the word 'grandfathers'.

accidents, traffic accidents, and suicide and homicide are four times more common among men than among women in urban parts of Brazil; d) finally, men consume more alcohol and tobacco, which are associated with cancer and cardiovascular disease and the latter are therefore much more common among men (Veras, 2003). Some children also note that grandmothers and grandfathers have different attitudes towards health and that this has an impact on their longevity.

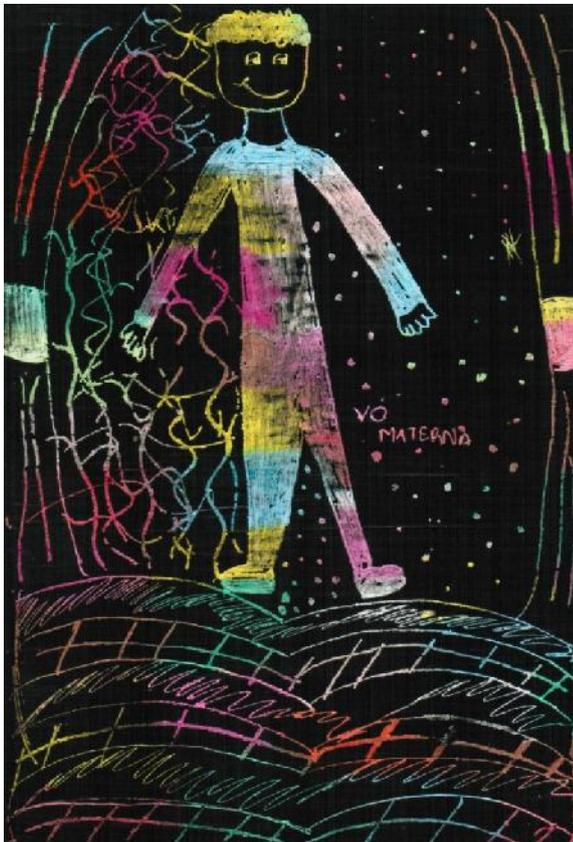


Fig. 64: Alice's drawing of her grandparents.

Fernando – There are other differences. *Grandfathers drink more than grandmothers.* My grandpa used to drink and drink and drink. And smoked like a chimney... While my granny only drinks occasionally. She goes three or four months without touching a drop.

Leonardo – *My grandpa died because he used to smoke.* He stopped smoking when he started to realize it was bad for him and now he's dead.

Fernanda – *My grandpa used to drink rum all day.* Never beer. He said it was beer, but it wasn't. Once, when I was poking through his things, I found a glass of something and I showed it to my mum and she threw it out. *And he used to smoke, until my granny left him, and then he died.* While my granny only has a drink once in a blue moon.

This is perhaps also why Marcelo wrote that he would like to ask his grandfather “to quit smoking, so that he doesn’t die soon” and so that they can continue “walking in the park at the weekends” or “playing in the yard with the dog”. João’s best memory of his grandparents is the fact that “since [his] grandpa moved to another city, he’s stopped smoking forever; he doesn’t even want to look at a cigarette... When I visited him, it was great, because I could see that he was living in a nice house and that he didn’t have any friends who smoked any more. My grandpa only had good friends, who went out to parties and almost never drank. *So it was very good to see my grandpa in such a good way!*”. As we can see, the children’s view of their grandfathers is somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, their relationships with their grandchildren tend to be “less affectionate” than those established with grandmothers, which shows that men seem to be less involved in this relationship. In addition, grandfathers tend to adopt less healthy behavior patterns – often to the disapproval of their grandchildren –, which puts a certain distance between them. On the other hand, we can also see that grandfathers can at times be fun to be with – in an exciting, or even dangerous way – which distinguishes them from grandmothers.

However, gender differences are not restricted to the styles or modes of interaction adopted by grandmothers and grandfathers. The different sides of the family constitute another important gender difference that influences the manner and intensity of contact established between grandparents and their grandchildren. Many studies have shown that, in Western Societies, ties tend to be stronger on the mother’s side than on the father’s, in view of the central role that women play in family relations (Roberto & Stroes, 1995; Norris & Tindale, 1994; Attias-Donfut, 2001; Cunha & Matos, 2010). As Britto da Motta (2004) remark, “women ‘weave’ or intermediate domestic and family relations, traditionally keeping two or three generations together” (p.6). Thus, except in some situations of conflict or where it is impossible to do so, young mothers tend to seek more help from their own mothers than from their mothers-in-law when it comes to childcare, thereby strengthening contact with the maternal side of the family. Misunderstandings between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law may also weaken ties to the father’s side (Dench & Ogg, 2001), giving relations on the mother’s side even more weight. According to Attias-Donfut (2001), the predominance of contact with the mother’s side of the family can be seen even when father’s side is geographically closer. This means that many children have a stronger bond



with their mother's parents, which also ends up influencing their predilections, normally in favor of the latter.

Preferences on the part of grandparents vis-à-vis their grandchildren and vice versa arise first and foremost in early childhood, when there is redefinition of family roles owing to the birth of a new member and when these two generations tend to spend more time in each other's company, especially for reasons of childcare. When ties are strong, grandparents tend to occupy "a special place in the heart" (Luck) of the children, and they show that this affection is strong enough to last a lifetime, extending throughout adolescence and into adulthood. Lion, for example, says: "When I think of my grandmother, I remember how much I love her and that *she will always be with me in my heart*". The feeling of a love that is "forever" (Diego), "that will never go out" (Melissa) and that can be so great that it is "even bigger than the sun" (Alexandra) or than the "whole universe" (Natasha) is expressed by many children, who also communicate this love through their drawings covered in hearts. For Alexandra, the love she feels for her maternal grandmother is so great that it is beyond words: "Well, I can't say", she admits.

This shows the uniqueness and importance that certain grandparents have in the lives of their grandchildren. However this predilection does not occur spontaneously, but is influenced by various factors, such as the extent of contact, how often grandparents care for their grandchildren, the affinities between them, the games they play, the state of health of the grandparents and the exchange of gifts<sup>34</sup> and services, which, as Peixoto (2000)

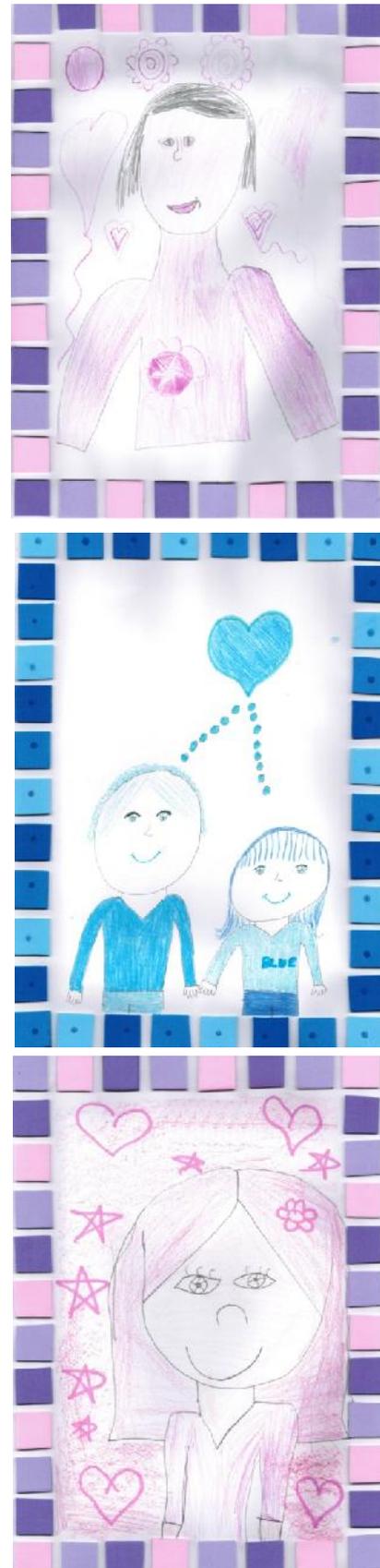


Fig. 65: From top to bottom: drawings by João, Catarina and Nycolle of their maternal grandmothers.

<sup>34</sup> The issue of gifts will be dealt with in more depth in Chapter 4.



notes, “are a sign of care for the other and nurture affection” (p.100). Nycolle, for example, regards her maternal grandmother as her “*favorite grandmother* because she is really cool and fun, and *gives her snacks and sweets* when she [the girl] visits her [the grandmother]”. It is the same with Felipe, who thinks that his maternal grandmother is really cool because “she *buys things* [for him] and is very kind”, and with Fernando, who says that his grandmother “is the best granny in the world and [that] she is *cool when she gives him presents*”.

The preference for the mother’s side of the family is also confirmed by this research. In the biography writing activity, in which the children were asked to choose one of their grandparents to write about, 25 of the 36 children interviewed chose to write about their maternal grandparents, ten about their paternal grandparents and one about a step-parent’s parent. There were practically no differences between boys and girls in terms of their choice of side of the family or of the gender of the grandparent they chose to write about. However, the preference for the maternal grandmother is quite strong: 21 children chose to write about their maternal grandmothers, while five chose their paternal grandmothers and four their maternal grandfathers. The reasons underlying the children’s choices are of varying kinds. With regard to grandfathers, be they paternal or maternal, the criterion normally concerned play and fun, aspects which, as remarked above, characterize the way in which the more engaged men view this role. In the case of the grandmothers, the criteria are more varied, although play and games are still important factors, cited as the main criterion especially for the choice of paternal grandmother:



Fig. 66: Drawing of Alex with his paternal grandfather, showing a moment of fun.

José – I chose to write about my paternal grandmother because I like her, *she plays cards with me and tells jokes*.

Daniele – I chose this granny [the paternal one] because she is the one who is always helping me, *playing with me, she is always there for me*.



Yasmin – I chose my paternal grandmother, because she is the coolest of all of them. She is the one *who is most fun*. She helps me *to do crosswords* and *plays with me* whenever I go there. She's my favorite granny!

Alex – I chose to write about my paternal grandmother, because she is *funny and fun* and elegant. *We play all sorts of things, such as hide and seek, Nintendo, Wii, General, and we also watch TV together.*

With regard to maternal grandmothers, play also forms part of their everyday activities, but this is not the main criterion for choosing them. There is a preference for the maternal grandmothers, because they are more involved in caring for the children, and helping them with tasks small and large. When the maternal grandmothers live with their grandchildren (in this research, there was only one case of co-residence with the paternal side of the family), these aspects are even more marked. Living together would seem to be, in fact, a determining factor with regard to predilection. All the children who lived with their grandparents chose to write about them, and again the maternal grandmother was the one most commonly mentioned (even when the grandfather also lived with them), showing that living together is an important criterion in establishing bonds of affection, as it enables care, support, and mutual aid.

Fernanda [on the maternal grandmother she lives with] – I chose to write about my granny because she is very special and *because she lives with me*. Also because she is very nice to me, happy, fun, funny, and she is *an expert in helping me* with homework when I'm worried about it.

Luck [on the maternal grandmother he lives with] – My granny is the best! That's why I decided to write about her. She is very dear to me, pretty, special, and really cool, because *looks after our house* all on her own and does all the work.

Leonardo [on the maternal grandmother he lives with] – I'm going to talk about my granny, because *I live with her and I'm close to her*. She's really cool too and *helps me with everything*, with difficult homework.

Jaqueline [on the maternal grandmother she lives with] – I chose this granny because *she lives with me, she is closer to me and helps me* and she is really nice, because she always *stands by me* when I am upset.

Clearly, more intensive contact may also occur between grandparents and grandchildren who do not live under the same roof. Grandparents that do not live with their grandchildren, but who help them whenever they need, look after them after school, spend weekends with them and keep in regular touch, by way of visits or telephone calls, also play a special role in the children's lives. The chatting, helping and sharing that goes on when

they are together, especially in the case of maternal grandmothers, nurtures a sense of intimacy and plays a part in their preference for this grandparent.

João [on his maternal grandmother, who he does not live with] – I chose to write about my granny because she's the one *I'm closer to*. I play more with her, because *I spend all my time with her*. She looks after me well, as if she were my own mother.

Catarina [on her maternal grandmother, who she does not live with] – I chose this granny because she's *the one that's closest to me*. She is very kind to me and gives me a lot of attention.

Lion [on his maternal grandmother, who he does not live with] – I chose to speak about my maternal grandmother, because *I stay with her almost every day* and because I like her a lot. My granny is really cool, pretty and a good person. *She looks after me almost all the time*, and that's why I love her. She makes my lunch *and is always looking out for me*.

Gabriella [on her maternal grandmother, who she does not live with] – I chose to write about my granny because she is always with me when I go to her house. *And I go there every day*. She's nice and she tickles my legs. I love her a lot, she's my sweetheart!

The grandmothers who care for the children also tend to be emotionally closer to them (Cunha & Matos, 2010). More constant contact enables stronger ties to be forged, which are being reinforced on a day to day basis. This is why physical proximity can often reveal emotional proximity. However, some preferences can also come from afar. Although living together or near one another is an important factor, in so far as it allows greater contact between the generations, it is not synonymous with affinity or commitment. There are components of an emotional order and, for this reason, analysis of these relations cannot overlook the psychological aspects (Attias-Donfut & Segalen, 1998). Some grandparents may be physically close but emotionally distant from their children and grandchildren (Peixoto, 2000), while others may nurture *intimacy from a distance* (Rosenmayer & Kockeis, 1963). Such situations need to be examined in the context of the individual's family life, since situations such as divorce and reconstructed families may, for example, have a powerful impact, as we shall see in the next chapter.

## 2.5 Names and Styles

Attias-Donfut and Segalen (1998), in their discussion of the forms of address used for grandparents, have shown that the terms used by grandchildren are directly related to the



style of grandparenthood adopted by the older generation: “Tell me your name, tell me who named you, you who are a grandmother/grandfather, and I will tell you what kind of role you play, what style of grandparenthood you adopt” (p.81). Normally it is the first children who give birth to the first grandchildren, who propose a name for the new grandparents. In the family setting, they will create forms of address for the children, which they will react to from an early age, incorporating this new word into their everyday lives. This is how Carol says she learnt to call her paternal grandmother “grandma”: “*All my life I’ve called her grandma. My father said, ‘Go to grandma!’ So I started calling her that*”, the girl relates. The same occurred with Kátia: “*My father, he also called my granny ‘granny’, even though she is our granny, because he’s gotten used to it, he thinks it’s nicer. So, I got it from him*”.

Alex, whose paternal grandmother is Argentinean, has learnt to maintain the term used in her mother tongue: “I call her *abuela*, which means granny in Spanish”, he explains. He, as well as Carol and Kátia, also learnt this form of address from his father: “It was enough *that my father said that I could call her abuela, Dona Ada or Beba!* [the last two are nicknames] But I actually prefer to call her *abuela*. She’s my *abuela!*”. Daniele also learnt how to address his grandmother on his step-mother’s side with her family: “I call my granny ‘Granny Teresa’, because *I’ve grown used to it*. They started to call her Granny Teresa and it caught on”. In his statement, Daniele also shows that this name is transmitted by other family members. As his grandmother was already called this by her family, Daniele picked up the term from those who already had this relationship with her before he was born: “First it was Jô, who is Teresa’s daughter, who started to call her this. Then it was my father, then me and now my little brother”.

If, on the one hand, parents initiate the use of these terms by the children by telling them to “Go to granny!” or “Say Hi to Grandpa!” the terms are also spread among the children themselves, creating a cycle of intragenerational learning: “I call my grandpa Kioto ‘Odi’. *It was my cousin who gave him this name and it stuck!*” Yasmin recalls. “I call my granny Granny Isa. *It was my cousin who invented the name*”, Gabriella recounts. While Betina tells us that she learnt how to address grandmother through her sister: “*My sister, as she’s older, started to call her ‘Granny Geni’. And I picked it up from her*”. The names also change according to the linguistic abilities of the children, who transform the names they hear in their babbling. Melissa tells how she called her Grandpa Ronald ‘Ronu’ for a long

time: “When I was little, everyone called him Ronald, Ronald, *but I couldn’t say Ronald*. So I called him ‘Ronu’”.

However, names are not only handed down from older generations (be they parents, grandparents, older brothers and sisters, or cousins). Children are dynamic and imaginative and, in the course of their day-to-day co-existence with their grandparents, they themselves make up new names for them. Segalen (2001) remembers that, in Catholic France – until the mid-1940s in cities and later also in the countryside – most grandchildren received the names of the grandparents who were also godparents. The parents had little choice in the matter: the boys took the names from the father’s side of the family, and the girls from the mother’s. Gradually, this system broke down and the choice of names by the biological parents began to establish intergenerational autonomy. As Singly (2004) remarks:

In this passage from one form of naming to another, the decisive element is the “random” choice of the child’s name by the parents [...] The person should be themselves from the very first day of life: the child is no longer a substitute for their grandfather or grandmother; he or she must invent a repertoire of their own, even though their families still look for similarities (p.88).

For Segalen (2001a), this break signals a transformation of the kinship system, which comes to emphasize the individuality of its members, from the earliest years of childhood. If, at some point in history, it was the third generation that named the first, this process seems to have been inverted in recent years: “The world has been turned on its head: [now] grandchildren give names to their grandparents” (Segalen, 2001a, p.82), in the words of the French sociologist. In fact, the list of terms used by children is long and brings a large number of factors into play. Often, they play with the grandparents real names, looking for rhymes that sound like them: “I call my maternal grandmother Pedra ‘pedra’. And I call my grandpa Marino... ‘Marino pepino’! It’s because ‘Pedra’ is like ‘pedra’ and ‘Marino’ rhymes with ‘pepino’!” exclaims Diego.<sup>35</sup> “I call my granny Marli ‘Marri’, which is more fun”, Adriana explains. “I call granny Rosária ‘Tetê’”, Carol reveals, “because when she was little her nickname was Teca, and changed that into Tetê”. “My grandpa Cacho is called Carlos”, Florência\* writes, showing that the nickname has more to do with him than his real name, which she puts in parentheses, as can be seen the extract reproduced below.

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<sup>35</sup> In Portuguese, ‘Pedra’ is a first name and ‘pedra’ means stone; ‘Marino’ is a first name and ‘pepino’ means cucumber and it rhymes with ‘Marino’.

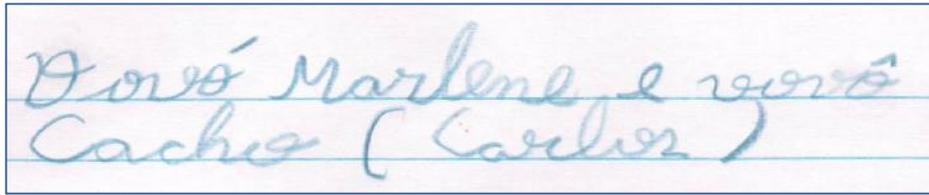


Fig. 67: Extract from Florência's\* writing, in which we can see the importance of the nickname (Cacho) compared to the real name (Carlos). [Grandma Marlene and Grandpa Cacho (Carlos)].

Melissa has also transformed the names of her paternal grandparents:

Melissa – I wanted to give my granny a nickname. I didn't want to call her Marta. I wanted a more affectionate nickname that I could say. So, one day I said 'Martuchi'! Except that Martuchi is longer than Marta and I wanted something a bit shorter... I was saying Martuchi and then suddenly 'Tuchi' came out. And she liked it! So, I thought that Tuchi was more affectionate, shorter, and easier to say. When I shout, instead of saying "Maaaaarta" or "Martuuuuuchi", I shout "Tuuuuchi", which is faster and easier.

Melissa shows how her intention to give a nickname to her grandparents came from the need to find a personalized and affectionate name that she alone, as a grandchild, could use. She also saw the diminutive 'Tuchi' as being "more affectionate, shorter [and] easier to say" (Melissa). Segalen (2001) reminds us that the use of names in their diminutive form means, "according to the dictionary, a proper name formed in the same way, indicating familiarity and affection in the one who uses it" (p. 89). If some children derive nicknames from their grandparents' real names, others use their physical characteristics or manner. Thus Betina calls her maternal grandmother 'Gorducha' [fatty], as she has written on the drawing reproduced on the right, and Felipe calls his maternal grandfather 'Grandpa Careca' [baldy]: "I call him this because he's bald and because he's my grandpa", the boy explains. "And now



Fig. 68: Detail of Betina's drawing of her grandparents, showing the nickname she uses for her maternal grandmother.

my mother calls him that too. When we talk to him on the telephone, she says 'Felipe, it's Grandpa Careca!'. Pedro calls his maternal grandmother 'Big Momma' because she

“sometimes acts like Big Momma in the film<sup>36</sup>; she makes a mess, eats, and they even look alike!”.

The nicknames also provide evidence of change in the nature of relations between grandparents and grandchildren. Since not long ago, the image of grandparents was associated with “the powerful authority of an older generation” (Peixoto, 2000, p.98), which produced a kind of emotional barrier. This started to change in the 1930s, when there was a rise in life expectancy, the patriarchal model started to break down and grandparents started to help children socialize the grandchildren (Peixoto, 2000). In fact, the children’s remarks show that spending time together produces an emotional proximity that leads affection to be translated into words. These words are not chosen randomly by the children. They symbolize the quality and the extent of the affection in these relations.

This is why Melissa has not given a nickname to her maternal grandfather, but calls him by his real name: “I gave a nickname to the others, but I just call him Leopoldo. *I didn’t give him a nickname because I don’t like him much. He’s a bit of a bore*”, she says. Alexandra, who has a warmer relationship with her maternal grandparents, says she calls her grandmother “grandma, granny, granny Nice, and granny dear” and her grandfather “grandpapa Cione [from Alcione], grandpa Sapeca [amusing], grandpa Moleque [mischievous] and grandpa Brincalhão [funny]”, while she calls her paternal grandparents ‘grandpa Flávio’ and ‘grandma Nara’: “It’s because my granny from here is very dear to me! And my grandpa, he’s a one, he’s always messing about at lunchtime and granny always tells him off. He’s a handful!”, says Alexandra, who sees little of her paternal grandparents since her parents separated and shows us that she doesn’t have a real good relationship with them:

Alexandra [on her paternal grandparents, who live out of town] – My grandparents from there don’t care much about me, because the granny from there only talks to me father and my father only talks to my grandpa, who just smokes and eats and watches TV.

The exclusive use of the proper name, without ‘granny’ or ‘grandpa’ occurs primarily to signal the forms of address for social grandparents, as we shall see in the coming chapter. Nevertheless, it may also signal a desire on the part of the children that is not necessarily for

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<sup>36</sup> Pedro is referring to the comic movie, *Big Momma’s House*, in which an FBI agent (Malcolm) disguises himself as a grandmother to capture a mugger.



distance. Each of these situations needs to be analyzed on its own merit, as Melissa's words suggest:

Melissa – I call my granny 'Marta' and my grandpa 'Ronaldo'. My father also calls her Marta. Now he calls her mother, but he didn't used to, and I got used to it and I like it. [...] People are always asking me, "Why do you call her Marta? Why do you call her Marta? You should call her granny!" But I don't like to call her granny. I prefer Marta!

According to Segalen (2001a), the suppression of these terms (granny, grandpa and so forth) may also signal a relationship that is marked by less formality, less emotional distance and less respect for the authority of older generations. "Calling a relative by their name grants that person a unique place as a unique individual. Authorizing a child to call one by one's name puts the child on an equal footing with adults." (Segalen, 2001a, p.85).

But the use of these terms is also very common among children. Many of them use the terms 'grandpa' and 'grandma' to address their grandparents: "When I call her I go 'GRANNY!'", Lion shouts. In Portuguese, the word for grandfather (*avô*) is derived from the Spanish, *abuelo*, which, in turn, is derived from Latin, *avus*, with no distinction between the maternal and paternal sides of the family, as occurs in Northern Europe: in Norwegian, for example, *farfar* and *farmor* are used for the paternal grandpaernts ("father's father" and "father's mother" respectively) and *morfar* and *mormor* for the maternal grandparents ("mother's mother" and "mother's father"); although there is also a generic term: *betfar* ("father's best") and *bestmor* ("mother's best") (Segalen, 2001a). In Brazil, the Portuguese terms, 'avô' and 'avó' also undergo modifications, and can be used in their abbreviated colloquial forms – 'vô' and 'vó' – or reduplicated as 'vovô', 'vovó' or with a further diminutive suffix 'vovozinho' and 'vovozinha'. However, these are not used indiscriminately by children. There are some strategies in the form of address used, as we can see in the reports reproduced below:

Catarina [on her maternal grandmother] – I call my granny Laci 'vó'. *But when she is really nice to me, I call her 'vovó'.*

Natasha [on her maternal grandmother] – I call her 'vovó' or 'vovozinha'. [...] I call her 'vovozinha' when I want something but normally I call her 'vovó'.

Alexandre [on both his grandmothers] – Sometimes, as a joke, when I want something, I call her 'vovó querida'. But strictly as a joke. Otherwise, I call her 'vó'.

Fernanda [on her maternal grandmother] – I call my granny ‘vó’ or ‘vovó’. Like this: Oh dearest ‘vovó’, *can I have some money?* Or: ‘Vovó’, *give me something?* But on an everyday basis, I use ‘vó’...

Ashley [on her maternal grandmother] – I use ‘vó’ and ‘vovó’. *But I use ‘vovó’ more when I want something. I say dearest ‘vovó’...*

While the day-to-day use of these terms derives from direct contact between these two generations, when the grandchildren want to talk about their grandparents to other relatives, they tend to add their real name or nickname to differentiate them, as João and Kátia explain:

João – When I call him I say ‘vô’, but when I’m talking to someone else, I say ‘vô Ivan’.

Kátia – I don’t say it to my granny, but I call her ‘vó Zu’ when I’m talking with my mum. I say: “Mum, *let’s go to ‘vovó’ Zu’s?*” [...] But when I’m talking to my granny herself, I just say ‘vó’.

However, in the course of our research meetings, I came to realize that, while some of the children always made reference to their grandparents’ names after the noun when they spoke of them, others simply omitted this information. This occurred primarily among those who had little or no affection for or contact with one of the sides of the family. It could be deduced that they did not do this when it made no sense to distinguish between one grandparent and another, since only one of them was considered to be the “true representative of this role”, as we shall see in the next chapter. Another interesting phenomenon is the fact that, in everyday contact between these two generations, there is a certain tendency to use the proper name after the term ‘vô’ or ‘vó’, when the child is less close to the older generation. This is the case with Catarina, who calls her paternal grandmother, whom she sees only on the holidays, ‘Vó Helena’, and her maternal grandmother, whom she sees every day, just ‘vó’; and Jaqueline, who calls the grandmother who does not live with her and whom she sees some weekends, ‘Vó Ida’ while she calls the grandmother she lives with ‘vó’; and André, who calls the grandmother he sees less of ‘vó Ana’ and the one he sees everyday ‘vó’, as he explains in the dialogue below:

André – I call granny Vera ‘granny’, and granny Ana ‘granny Ana’.

Researcher – And why do you call granny Ana ‘granny Ana’ and granny Vera just ‘granny’?

André – Because I spend more time with granny.



And, as the mother's side of the family tends to be closer-knit than the father's side, and contact with the grandmother warmer than that with the grandfather, most of the nicknames or so-called "addressing" strategies are divided up twice by gender. But the grandparents must agree with the forms of address chosen by the children. This is why Carol says that she calls her paternal grandmother 'vovó': "My granny Eliane *doesn't let me call her 'vó'*. She says that I have to call her 'vovó' because she thinks it makes her sound younger". This is also the reason why Melissa gave a nickname to her paternal grandmother but not her grandfather: "My granny told me that she prefers me to call her 'Tuchi', because no-one else calls her that... I was thinking of 'Ronucho' for my grandfather, but he said it sounded ugly. He didn't like it... so I just call him Ronald, which is his real name...".

In this interactive process of choosing names, the grandparents also show how close they want to be to their grandchildren, which is apparent from the relationships with the social grandparents. We will investigate these appellations in greater depth in the next chapter, where we deal with the particular features of these ties, but the case of Carol already points to the fact that the grandparents themselves take a stand on this, increasing or diminishing their degree of involvement with them: "Laís, Grandpa Alberto's wife, I call her 'auntie'. And she always says: 'What can *auntie do to help you?*' So I've never called her 'granny'". In this statement, we can see how a relationship is marked as not being one of direct grandparenthood.

In intergenerational relations, the names attributed to the grandchildren by the older generation also reveal the nature of their relationship. Often, grandparents too give their grandchildren nicknames to show the extent of their affection. The names of the children are transformed: Julia becomes 'Ju' or 'Juju'; Marcelo becomes 'Celo'; André becomes 'Dé'; Michael becomes 'Má'; Nathália becomes 'Nati'. In addition, other appellations appear: "My granny calls me lots of things: 'love', 'son', 'grandson'", says André; "My granny calls me 'Chiquinho'", says Alex; "My granny on my mother's side calls me 'bro' and sometimes 'son'", recounts Alexandre; "My granny calls me 'sweetheart'", Alexandra explains; "Mine calls me 'beautiful' and 'little grand-daughter'", says Maria. In apparently less affectionate relations (so far as we can tell), the grandparents do not necessarily call their grandparents anything, as Alexandra and Jaqueline tell us:

Alexandra – My granny calls me lots of things, but my grandpa just calls me “girl”. He just says [imitating her grandfather’s gruff voice]: “*Girl! Come here!*”

Jaqueline – My granny on my mother’s side calls me by my name and my granny on my father’s side doesn’t call me... I don’t know, I can’t remember what she calls me... It’s not that we don’t speak, but she doesn’t address me much. I can’t remember if she’s ever called me anything!

When the children do something that displeases their grandparents, the terms they use to address them change. Lion says he can tell his grandmother’s mood from the name she calls him: “My granny calls me ‘Negão’. And you know when a person is going to call you by your nickname? Like, when she calls me by my full name, I know she’s mad with me”, he says. The change from affectionate nickname to proper name is recognized by other children<sup>37</sup>:

Nathália – My granny calls me ‘Nati’, but when she’s mad, when I’ve been up to no good, she calls me ‘Natália’.

Rodrigo – My granny calls me ‘Rô’, but when she’s mad at me, she calls me ‘Rodrigo’.

Larissa – My granny calls me ‘Alexandra’, but when she is mad at me [at this point the girl actually raises her voice] she says: “*Larissa da Silva Fagundes, come here!*”

Nicolas – My granny calls me ‘Niti’ or ‘Nicolas’, but when she is mad at me, she calls me ‘Nicolas Fontoura’. ...She only says ‘Nicolas Fontoura’ when I’ve done something really bad, like broken something. One day, I scared the cat and it ran away and broke a vase. And she said: “*Nicolas Fontoura! What have you broken?*”

The use of full first names or full names appears to reveal some kind of discordance between the generations, which emerges principally when the grandchild “has done something really bad” (Alexandre). However, this does not necessarily appear to be an intergenerational conflict, but rather takes on the character of a caution, as we shall see throughout the next chapter. Segalen (2001a) invites us to consider the great flexibility that exists in the use of names and the way they are used varies according to social relations and position in the family. Hence, “the terms are not stereotypical labels, but a dynamic expression of attitudes and relations” (p.91).

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<sup>37</sup> In the selected excerpts below, which refer to the original names of the children, I will not use the names chosen by them for the research, to avoid giving away their identities. Surnames are also fictitious.

## Children's Family Dictionary

**Adults:** "C'est juste des enfants qui ont grandi."

**Adults:** "They are just children who have grown up." (Maëlle, 6 years)

**Liquide amniotique:** "Eau du ventre des mamans ou les bébés ne se noient pas – même sans bouée."

**Amniotic Fluid:** "Water in mummy's tummy where the babies don't drown, even without floats." (Clémence, 5 years)

**Maman:** "C'est le nom de ma mère."

**Mummy:** "My mother's name" (Christopher, 5 years)

**Mamie:** "Femme qui n'a pas d'enfants. C'est pour cela qu'elle aime les enfants des autres."

**Granny:** "A woman who doesn't have children. That's why she loves other people's children." (Maxence, 7 years)

**Mariage:** "C'est quand deux grandes personnes se mettent ensemble pour supporter des choses qu'elles ne veulent plus supporter toutes seules. Comme descendre toujours la poubelle."

**Marriage:** "When two grown-up people stay together to help them do things that they don't want to do alone, like taking the trash out every day." (Constance, 9 years)

**Papa:** "Homme qui a été inventé pour aimer les mamans."

**Daddy:** "A man who was invented to love mummies." (Alexandra, 5 years)

**Vie:** "C'est une histoire vraie."

**Life:** "A true story." (Ludivine, 9 and a half years)

## Chapter 3

### *Families, Children and Grandparents: Contact, care and geographical proximity*



(Source: Ajmera, Kinkade & Pon, 2009)

In the last chapter, we saw how the birth of a new family member involves all the other members of the family and gives each of them a new role. The positions of ‘grandparent’ and ‘grandchild’ reflect this shift, a naming that occurs as a result of the family ties that are created following birth or adoption<sup>38</sup> of a new member. As this is a relation

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<sup>38</sup> The term “adoption” is used here to refer to the relation that social grandchildren have in relation to their social grandparents and vice versa. This thesis does not propose to go into the specific details of the legal status of an adoption.



within the family, analysis of it cannot be performed outside of the context that gives it meaning. We must look at the private lives and the meanings assigned by the individuals who actually occupy these positions, if we wish to better understand the relations pertaining between grandparents and grandchildren and how these are modified according to the lifestyles and family contexts in which they are embedded. If age and gender influence the way these two generations relate to one another, family configurations seem to be an even greater determining factor, since separations and conflicts between family members may weaken and even break links between generations.

In the last few decades, there have been a large number of changes in patterns of life and there are now many more different kinds of family. Greater life expectancy and a reduction in the fecundity rate, for example, have given families a more vertical structure, linking its members across generations rather than within a single generation. On the other hand, the high numbers of common law marriages, divorces and separations have led to an increase in the number of single-parent and reconstructed families, with a higher turnover of individuals coming into and leaving the family. Unemployment, leaving the parental home at a late age, longer years of schooling and the massive influx of women into the employment market have also contributed greatly to changes in family structure, altering the time at which certain transitions occur in the lives of men and women and thereby creating new areas for negotiation between the public and the private sphere.

These changes are not only structural. They occur because people have new expectations with regard to their lives and their intimate relationships. If there was a time when “people got married because they were in love, love demanded marriage and it was within marriage that love could best be realized” (Segalen, 1999, p.152), nowadays, the institutional tie of marriage does not seem to be such a vital factor. Greater sexual liberation, living together during holidays and weekends, and experiences of common law marriage have shown that there is no longer a clear division between *before* and *after* marriage, and marriage is no longer needed to authorize the building of a family or procreation: in 2007, 54.4% of Norwegian children, 54.7% of Swedish children and 58.1% Estonian children had been born outside of marriage (Lanzieri, 2008).

In the United Kingdom, in the course of just four decades, the number of common law marriages has risen 400%, going from 4% for women born in the 1920s, to 19% for those



born in the 1940s and 50% for those born in the 1960s (Giddens, 2005). And, although cohabitation is becoming normal for couples – principally for those aged under 25 (Lazo, 2002) – it would also seem to be a less stable option than marriage, since unmarried couples who live together are three to four times more likely to separate than married couples (Giddens, 2005). “Refusing to marry is a refusal to submit to the couple’s relationship to forces that go beyond romantic ones”, Segalen (1999, p.153) remarks, providing “greater mutual autonomy for both partners, both in terms of organization of space and time and social life” (Saraceno & Naldini, 2001, p.111).

For many children studied it is precisely this feeling of affection that justifies marriage. People *marry* because they want to “be together” (João), “because they like each other” (Felipe) or “because they love each other” (Lucas). The relation appears to be more centered on the feelings of the couple than on building a family. The arrival of children itself becomes something that is voluntary, since it is no longer the main objective of marriage, as Melissa points out: “I think that people marry *because they love one another!* They meet, *fall in love, start dating* and decide they want to *live together*. They don’t want to marry just to have children... they love each other, *and that’s why they get married*”. Melissa’s words show that, apart from highlighting affection as the driving force behind this relation, she also refers to marriage as “living together”, thereby demonstrating that there are other possibilities. For Alexandre, “having children is not the aim of marriage, because some people fall in love and *want to lead their lives together*, and this is what matters. There are many married couples who don’t have children but are happy”.

It is fair to say that up to the mid 1960s<sup>39</sup> there was a high degree of overlap between marriage and interpersonal relations, based primarily on romantic love, the gender division of labor and a special degree of attention to children. With feminist ideas and criticism of the housewife model for women, growing cohabitation outside of wedlock, the introduction of divorce by mutual consent and changes in lifestyle, intimate relations underwent significant

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<sup>39</sup> During this period, some changes began to be seen in conjugal and family relations. However, it is not fixed or a determining factor, which means that adoption of this kind of behavior was not experienced equally throughout the population. In contemporary societies, we can see different models of marriage coexisting. In addition, each couple can build up their own kind of marriage, adopting principles that may change in the course of their lives. Class also affects personal choices. While middle-class couples tend to want a more individualized kind of marriage – even though as Torres (2001) and Goldenberg (2003) show, there may be some disparity between what is planned and what they actually do in practice –, working class couples tend to fuse together in marriage. It is possible that the scarcity of resources means that they have less access to “alternative social identities”.



changes, so that what brings partners together became less a happy family – as in the Parsonian functionalist model of the “happy family” – than personal happiness. For Singly (2007), this shift of focus in relations marks the transition from “modern family I” to “modern family II”, in which the existence of individual space has become indispensable in conjugal life.

The individual goes through a process of individualization, whereby he or she desires to be, at the same time, an “individual with” and a “single individual” (Singly, 2001), where ties with the other person can be strengthened or loosened according to the individual’s own needs. This prevalence of the “I” over the “we” does not however entail the disappearance of the family. What has changed is the motivation for being together, which are established and re-established on a daily basis. While, for “modern family I” marriage was indissoluble, for “modern family II” marriage takes on a voluntary character and merger is no longer valued: the desire is not for two to become one, but for *one plus one* to make two, as Saraceno and Naldini (2001) show, with reference to the French sociologist, Irène Thèry. Some children also observe that there has been a change in the way that adults conduct relationships. Luck says he can see “that grandparents nearly always stay together, while mothers and fathers separate more often than grandparents”. For Baiano, this is explained by the fact that they come from different times “there were no modern things to do, there was no pill, no computers and they only had the soap opera”. Carol also remarks that there is a discourse of family crisis that comes with the new ways of conducting relationships: *“Some older grandparents say, ‘It wasn’t like this in my day! In my day, no-one separated, everyone got married early and stayed married!’”*.

Despite the supposed happiness of times gone by, most children believe that the best option between getting married “till death us do part” and having the freedom to get divorced when the relationship is not going well, is the latter: “I think that it is better these days, because, nowadays, it’s easier to separate, because if you don’t like your wife any more, then it’s over... you don’t want to be with her any more”, says Luck. “Yes. When they don’t love each other anymore, when their love isn’t what it used to be, then I think they should separate, they can’t go on living together. There are lots of TV programs that show that when a mother and a father don’t get on any more, they stop smiling, they get depressed and the children are sad too. So, it’s best to split up!” (Alice). “It is better to



separate, because the mother can always find herself a step father, it's better than living with fighting and sadness" (Melissa).

The relationship comes to be something that is established in the course of living together, as part of a process that only persists when both partners consider themselves to be extracting sufficient individual satisfaction for their personal happiness. According to Giddens (1993), this is characteristic of the emergence of a *pure relationship*, and its expression is strongly linked to the generic restructuring of intimacy, which is shifting from *romantic love* to *confluent love*. In the first case, there is a projective identification with the partner that leads to idealization and a sensation of totality in the presence of the other. In the second, "love is active, contingent, [which means that] it clashes with the categories of 'forever' and 'one and only' in romantic love" (Giddens, 1993, p. 72). For this reason, the fairy-tale ending, "and they lived happily ever after" is no longer the end of the story, but "the beginning of a story whose script has not yet been written, in which the actors will have to decide on a day-to-day basis whether they will be in the scene or not" (Saraceno & Naldini, 2001, p.106).

Once it is (confluent) love that lies at the heart of a relationship, it cannot exist without the principle that gave rise to it. This is why people separate: because they "are no longer happy together" (Luca), "don't like each other anymore" (Amanda), "don't love each other" (Melissa), "aren't as good friends as they used to be" (Fernanda) or "not having a very good life with that person any more" (Alexandre). When the couple feel "that the love is going away, it is better that they separate" (Alice), "because that way they can live better lives" (Fernanda), "they can have a new family, they can meet other people and be reborn again" (Nanda). Emotional needs lie at the center of most contemporary relationships, and these are sufficient to justify their continuation. Thus, once love breaks down, or one of the spouses does not feel fulfilled in their marriage anymore, the marriage tends to come to an end. In Brazil, one in four marriages ends in separation: divorce rates have gone up 200%, from 4.6‰, in 1984, to 1.49‰ in 2007 (IBGE, 2008). And, if on the one hand, this is an expression of changes in the behavior of the population, on the other, these changes are also reflected in the legislation, which with Act 11,441, of 4 January 2007, took the



bureaucracy out of consensual divorce and separation procedures in the country.<sup>40</sup> The focus on the emotional side of things is transforming marriage and making married life more uncertain. Thus, as the divorce rates rise, marriages are lasting for shorter periods of time. As Singly (2007) points out, the average duration is around four years.

Researcher – And why do you think that grown-ups separate?

Isabela\* – Oh, because sometimes they want another boyfriend, don't they? Sometimes *they're a bit fed up* of staying with the same person and want to go out with someone else for a bit. Another person, you see. That's why! Like me: I invite a friend home to play... we play and play and play *but then we get tired of playing together and I want to play alone or with someone else*. You get fed up, you see.

Divorces, separations, break-ups and remarriages do not only redirect the lives of the couple directly involved. When there are children, these too are affected by their decisions, as are the grandparents, who need to negotiate new forms of family interaction. Nowadays, it is estimated that 40% of children see their parents split up before the age of 15 years and around 80% of separated parents remarry within the next three years. Of these, more than half separate again. As a consequence of the high incidence of remarriage, a fourth of children live for a time in a family that does not consist entirely of blood relatives (Costa, 2007). The reaction of children to such situations varies not only from child to child but also according to age group and from family to family. The way parents deal with the separation tends to be the main determining factor for the behavior of children rather than the separation itself, Costa (2007) notes.

Children who see conflict between their parents tend to adjust better to the divorce than those who perceive no disharmony and are suddenly surprised by the decision (Hetherington, 2003). And if, on the one hand, this is a striking episode, which may leave the children emotionally vulnerable, anxious and profoundly saddened, making them cry “buckets” (Adriana) or “fill the house with tears” (Catarina), on the other, it may also bring about a move to a more harmonious, rewarding and salubrious life: “When my parents split up, I didn't like it much. But now I think it was for the best. My mum is much happier and I can see that she doesn't get as angry as she used to”, Fernanda observes.

The children who go through a parental separation need to adapt to the new life, learning to live emotionally with the situation and creating a new type of relationship, both

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<sup>40</sup> With this Law, consensual divorces and separations can be carried out by the spouses themselves (so long as they do not have children who are minors), by way of a public written statement in the presence of a lawyer at any registry office in the country.



with their parents and other family members. In this process, although there is an abrupt change in that the parents no longer live together, the parents may also choose to establish new intimate ties, which means that the children need, once again, to adapt. In situations like this, the concept of the family may widen, and, likewise, there may be a change in relations with the biological grandparents and the emergence of relations with social grandparents. But are social grandparents considered real grandparents by the children themselves? How do changes in families strengthen or restrict relationships between grandparents and grandchildren? How do children give meaning to these relations?

### 3.1 *Living with mummy and daddy: nuclear families and grandparents*

When the children live in nuclear families, there would seem to be no doubt as to who belongs or does not to the restricted family: all of them draw their fathers, mothers, and brothers and sisters, if they have them. In these cases, the domestic unit covers two potential characteristics that complement one another: on the one hand its members are united by biological ties – “the father and the mother are essential because it was they who brought you into the world” (Luca), “we have the same blood in our veins” (Melissa) and “without them we would not exist” (Alexandre); on the other, they live under the same roof, which provides contact and intimacy, and even greater legitimacy for relations between family members. “They are the people who live in the same house as I do” (Alex), “the people I always see when I arrive home” (Betina), “the people closest to me” (Adriana), “the people who are with me more” (Érica) and “the people I feel most intimate with” (Luca).

The father and the mother are central figures in these families, representing the two lines of origin of the child. As Lévi-Strauss (1980) remarks, “for humanity as a whole, the absolute prerequisite for the creation of a [nuclear] family is the prior existence of two other families” (p.33) who donate one of their children to set up a new family unit. This new unit, comprising mother, father and children, characterizes the central axis in the drawings of all the children who live in nuclear families, as can be seen in the examples below:



Fig. 69: Betina's drawing of her family, in which we can see her, **her father**, **her mother**, her sister and her pets.



Fig. 70: Érica's drawing of her family, in which we can see **her father**, **her mother**, her, her brother and her dog.



Fig. 71: Adriana's drawing of her family, in which we can see her, **her mother** and **her father**.



Fig. 72: Catarina's drawing of her family, in which we can see **her father**, **her mother**, her brother and her.

As children live under the same roof as their parents, they also tend to see a lot of both their paternal and maternal grandparents – within the restrictions of the geographical distance that separates them and the quality of relations between the family members – in a fairly fluid fashion, which means that these children are in constant contact with both sides of the family. As Hawker, Allan and Crow (2001) put it, relations between grandparents and grandchildren depend on the nature of the ties cultivated by the middle generation, which means that parents have an important role in establishing this contact, as we can see in the everyday family life of these children.

Adriana, for example, always has the same routine: on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, she stays at their paternal grandparents' house and, on Tuesdays, at her maternal grandparents': "I have lunch there after school and stay there all afternoon",



the girl explains. In her map<sup>41</sup> we can see an important point of contact between the two sides of the family (marked by the black line), which is stronger on the father's side, possibly because her father and her grandfather work together. "My grandpa helps my father. He is a rep and he has an office at home", Adriana remarks. Telephone communication is also represented on both sides: "We ring my paternal grandparents to check they are OK", while in the case of the maternal grandparents "my granny rings us or *my mum* rings her to check she is OK. And I speak to her".

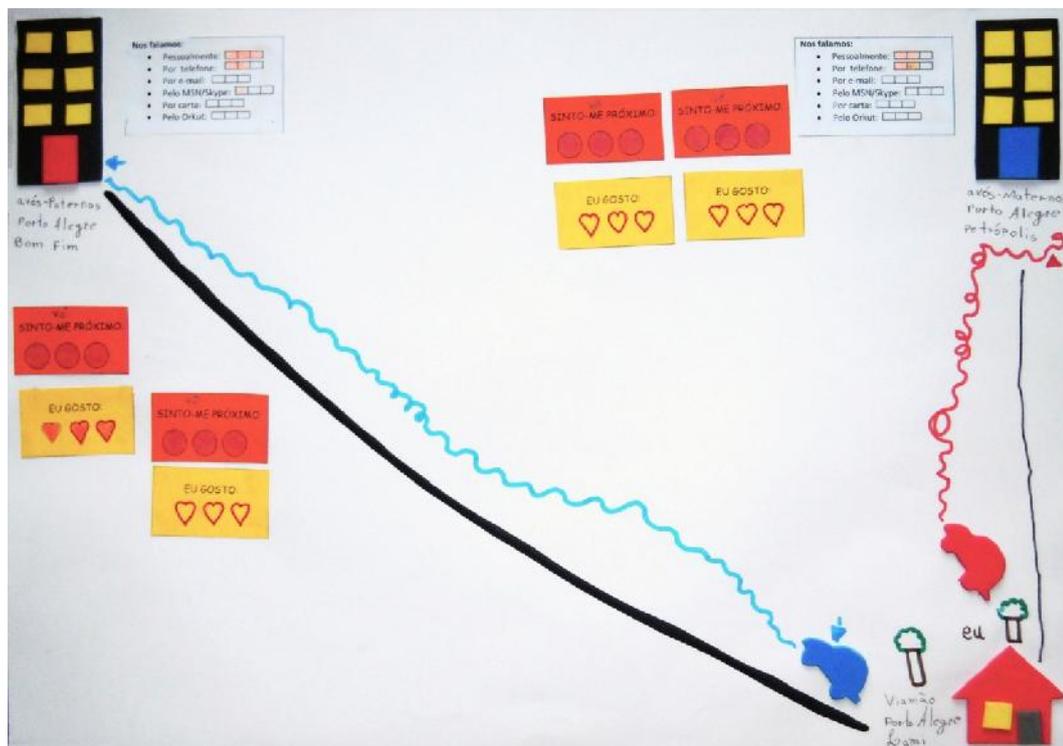


Fig. 73: Cartographic representation of Adriana's grandparents' homes.

Kátia, whose grandparents on both sides live in Porto Alegre, also frequently sees both: "I see my maternal grandparents during the week. In the afternoon, my grandpa comes to our house to bring honey and stuff... And we're always on the telephone. In fact, it's *my mum* who's always on the telephone; she's always having to ring my granny and ends up *putting me on*". In these conversations, "we send kisses, say that we miss each other and agree a time for them to visit". Her paternal grandmother, who is separated, usually visits them at the weekends: "She comes to our place almost every weekend, is always ringing us; she loves me and clings to me", the girl explains. Adriana and Kátia's words show a strong

<sup>41</sup> The term "map" or "cartographic" will be used to refer to the activity carried out by the children during the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting.



involvement on the part of their parents in maintaining contact with their grandparents, which can also be seen in Alexandre's family history.

His paternal grandmother lives in Porto Alegre and he usually visits her on Tuesdays after school: "My family has only one car. So, as my mum has a meeting on Tuesdays, she has the car. So she goes to the school meeting, and my grandmother has to pick us up, so we don't have to stay at school really late. After school, *dad picks us up and takes us to granny's house*", Alexandre explains. He sees his maternal grandmother, who lives in Veranópolis, 271km from the State capital, during the holidays: "We go there for Christmas and at the weekend when there's a bank holiday, but *my mum decides when we go*, because we have commitments, loads of things to do, a birthday...". He communicates with this grandmother more by telephone and, sometimes, by letter: "We ring each other up quite a lot and send postcards when we travel", Alexandre remarks. His map shows important points of contact with both sides of the family.

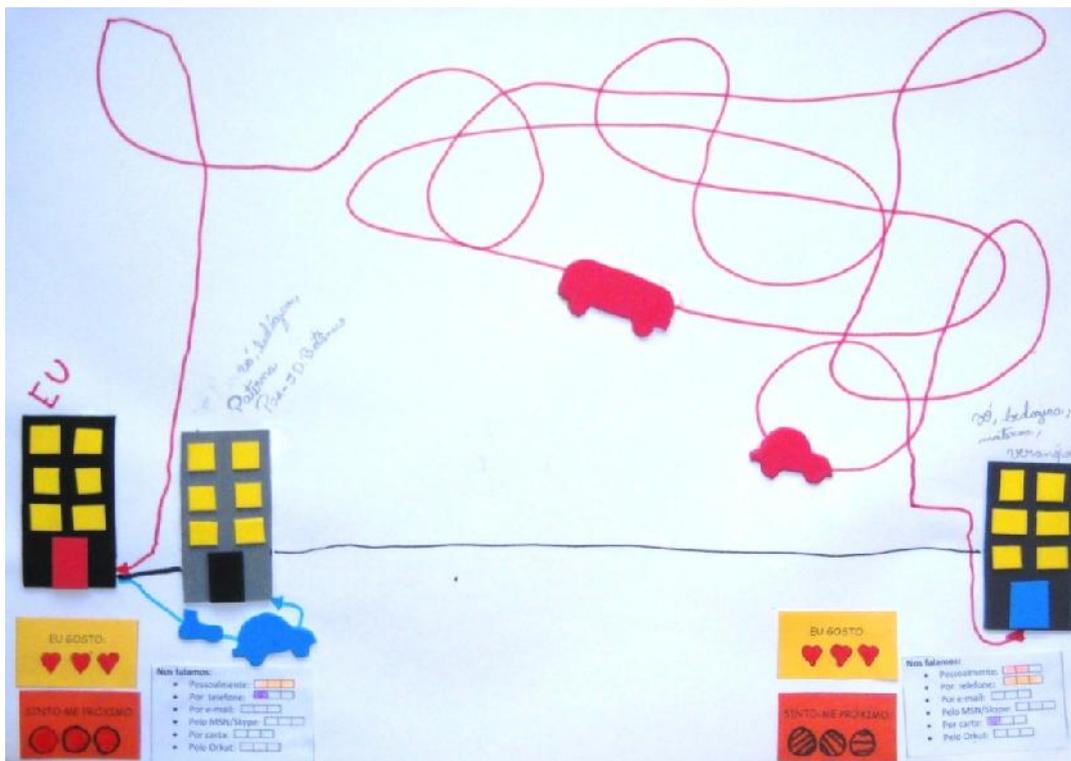


Fig. 74: Map of Alexandre's grandparents' homes.

When personal contact can no longer be as frequent and the children can only visit their grandparents during the holidays, conversations and intergenerational ties tend to be fuelled by telephone calls, letters and emails. Thus, like Alexandre, Catarina also makes use of this kind of technology to feel closer to her paternal grandmother, who lives in Santa



Maria, 317km from Porto Alegre: “We only [go] there at Christmas and New Year... I go there when there’s a holiday, *with my family*”, the girl explains. The greater part of her contact with her grandmother is by telephone: “I call her on her birthday and, sometimes, I call her see she’s OK”. Betina also knows what having distant grandparents means. Her maternal grandparents live in Campinas do Sul, 386km from the State capital, which means that she can only go there “on holidays and some weekends”. Telephone communication is thus important and is initiated principally by her mother: “When granny calls it’s *to find out how mum is and that. Then mum puts me on*”.

This is also the case with João. His maternal grandfather lives in Camaquã, 129km from Porto Alegre. Although they don’t see each other that often, they keep in touch by way of email, Orkut, telephone calls and letters. It is João’s mother who forms the bridge in this relation: “He always rings us and *my mother talks to him*. Nowadays, I talk to him quite a bit too. We almost never write letters. Only *my mum*. But I tell my mum things to write to him”, the boy explains. As we have just seen, mothers and fathers generate interaction between their parents and their children, thereby strengthening this relationship, even when they are far removed from one another geographically. Since the children are biologically and emotionally linked to their paternal and maternal grandparents, they tend to show both lines in their drawings, recognizing the generation status of all of them, as can be seen in the examples given below. If the drawings representing the family include the mother and the father, the drawings representing the grandparents include both sides of the family:

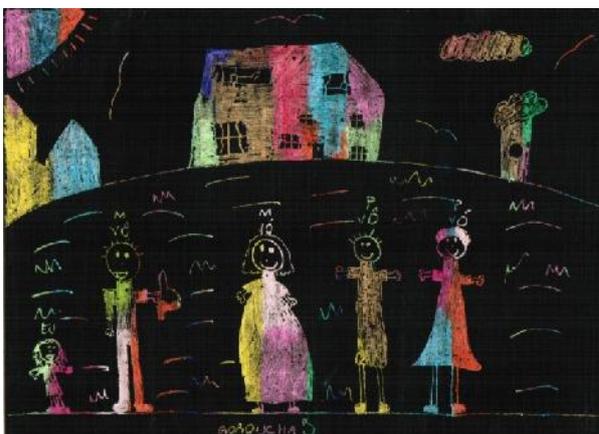


Fig. 75: Betina’s drawing of her grandparents, in which we can see her and both **paternal** and **maternal** grandparents.



Fig. 76: Érica’s drawing of her grandparents, in which we can see her and both **paternal** and **maternal** grandparents.



Fig. 77: Catarina's drawing of her grandparents, in which we can see both **paternal** and **maternal** grandparents.

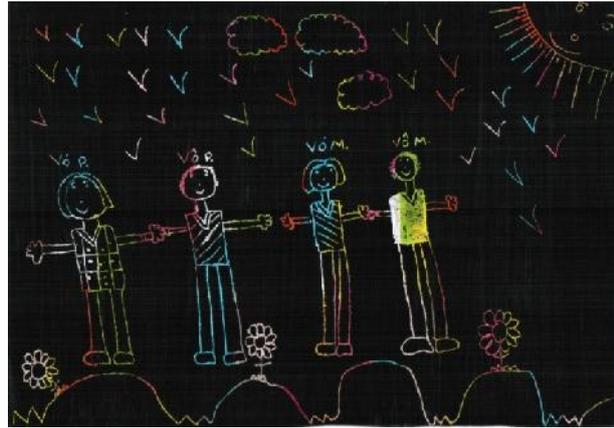


Fig. 78: Adriana's drawing of her grandparents, in which we can see both **paternal** and **maternal** grandparents.

However, this does not mean that contact is uniform on both sides of the family or that the relationships are equally important. As was seen in the previous chapter, these ties tend to be stronger with the mother's side, since women foster and strengthen intergenerational ties, which is also reflected in the everyday life of many of these girls and boys. The very way the "family geography" is structured facilitates contact with the maternal grandparents. As can be seen from the table below, of the nine children who live in nuclear families, six live in the same city as their maternal grandparents, while only three live near their paternal grandparents. The relation between geographical distance and frequency of personal contact is fairly significant: the grandparents who live in Porto Alegre, maternal or paternal, see their grandchildren at least once a week, while the others normally visit on holidays or family occasions. As they are geographically close to their children, they also help them more to look after their grandchildren.

**Table 4**

Relation between geographical distance and personal contact on the mother's and father's side of the nine nuclear families studied<sup>42</sup>

	At least once a week		One or two times a month		Holidays and Family Occasions	
	Paternal	Maternal	Paternal	Maternal	Paternal	Maternal
< 25 km	3 children	6 children			1 child	
25 km – 150 km			2 children			1 child
> 150 km					3 children	3 children

<sup>42</sup> The numbers in each line do not necessarily add up to nine, because one child does not have paternal grandparents and two have divorced grandparents.



Catarina's maternal grandmother, for example, sees her granddaughter every day after school: "I see my granny on my mother's side every day, because I have lunch with her every day. We are neighbors. I only have lunch at home on weekends". Catarina says she likes both her grandmothers "equally, though I don't have the same opportunity to see them... We're more used to seeing the ones that live nearer to us", as she only sees her paternal grandmother on holidays. Érica also spends more time with her maternal grandparents, who live in Porto Alegre, than with her paternal grandparents, who live in Águas Claras, 58km from the State capital: "I see my granny who lives here a lot, because I go to her place nearly every day. Because, sometimes my parents have to go out, go to the shopping center to buy stuff, *so my mother leaves me at granny's*. I also go there because I like it, because I just want to be there!". Érica also talks more about her maternal than her paternal grandmother, and shows that she even has her telephone number: "My [maternal] granny rings me at home or, sometimes, *I ring her...* but I only speak to my [paternal] granny when *she* calls, because *I don't have her telephone number*".

Alex also sees more of his maternal grandparents: "I see them every week, but not every day. Always on a Saturday. Almost every Saturday and Sunday and sometimes during the week too". In his drawing of his grandparents (reproduced below), he also only draws



Fig.79: Alex's drawing of his grandparents, in which we can only see his maternal grandparents sitting in the armchairs in the living room. His paternal grandmother does not appear.



the house of his maternal grandparents, as it is one of the places he visits most frequently: “I drew the house of my grandparents here in Porto Alegre because I’m always going there. But I didn’t draw my [paternal] granny Beba, because she doesn’t live with them,” Alex explains.

João also has much more contact with his maternal grandmother than with his other grandparents: “I like my grandmother a lot, *she talks a lot with my mum*, and that allows me to talk loads with her. We talk about school, my mum’s work, our lives”. Since his maternal grandmother is a big presence in his life, João even includes her in his drawing of the family, although he does not include his maternal grandfather or either of his paternal grandparents.



Fig.80: João’s drawing of his family, in which we can see his maternal grandmother included as a member of the family.

João – I drew my brother because I adore him. When we fight I don’t like him much, when he’s a pain and that... but he’s my brother. And my father and my mother because they brought me into the world and are kind to me. And my grandmother, because she is my mother’s mother and also, obviously, because she looks after me. Because, if both my mother and my father died, my brother and I could live with her. The person I would most like to be with is her, because she’s just like my mother. They are both very dear to me. I love my granny!

A greater degree of contact with the mother’s side of the family can also be seen when grandparents and grandchildren do not live in the same city. This is the case for Luca, who lives with his family in Porto Alegre and visits his grandparents in Cruz Alta, 350km from



the State capital. He usually sees both grandmothers at Christmas and New Year, when he stays at his maternal grandmother's: "I always stay at my [maternal] granny's place... From there we visit all the relatives, cousins and the rest". While Luca's family chooses to stay with his maternal grandmother, even though both grandmothers live alone in the same city, it is also his maternal grandmother who visits Luca more in Porto Alegre, as we can see from the directions he gives in his map. "On mother's day, sometimes it's so... sometimes we go and visit her. Sometimes she comes here. Like at Easter, Christmas and that. [...] But my paternal grandmother never comes". They also talk more on the telephone, ringing to exchange "news, happy things and sad things. [...] We see more of this [the maternal] grandmother", Luca says. "She's my favorite granny and I love her very much", he writes in his written assignment.

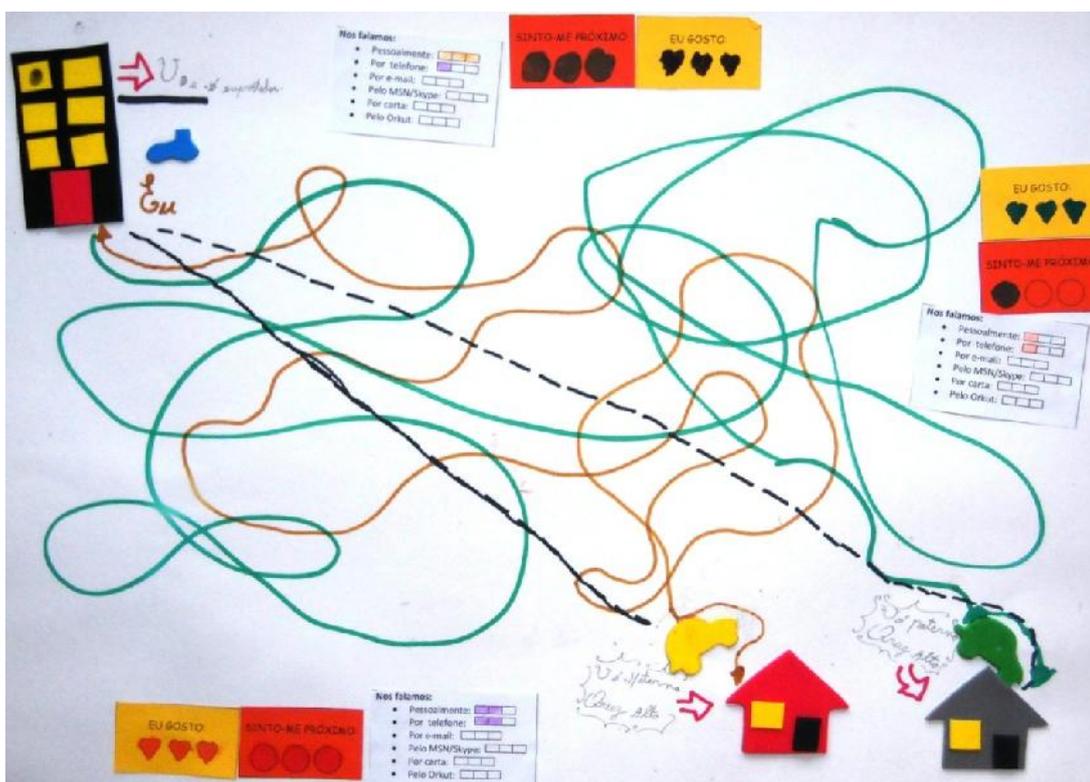


Fig.81: Luca's map of his grandparents' homes.

One interesting aspect of the contact between grandparents and grandchildren is its relation to childcare. As noted earlier, the grandparents who are geographically close to their grandchildren tend to see them more frequently and this allows for childcare relations to arise. However, in the nuclear families analyzed, this childcare appears to be somewhat occasional, occurring only when the young parents really need the assistance of the older



generation. Grandparents and grandchildren meet more just to be together: of the nine children interviewed, only two received any type of regular care from their grandparents. After school, the other children were looked after by a nurse (five), stayed alone (one) or stayed at school (one). However, this does not mean that the grandparents of the children living in nuclear families do not help their children with childcare, but that care is only provided at times of urgent need. When this occurs, help may come from afar. Luca's maternal grandmother, for example, packs her bags and travels 350km, whenever her daughter needs help. "When I'm very sick, my granny always comes here to look after me", the boy explains. As Alves (2007) points out, "studies of contemporary families reveal that old people, in their capacity as grandparents, are emerging as the figures who are calling the lie to the individualistic image of the nuclear family, isolated from other relatives" (p.126).

### 3.2 *Grandparents and Divorce*

When parents' divorce, family relations may be greatly impacted: not only do parents and children need to learn to "be a long-distance family" (Albertini & Saraceno, 2008), but grandparents and grandchildren also need to come up with new ways of interacting. Various factors affect the way families deal with this experience. The factors that are especially important for intergenerational relations are the way the parents and the grandparents related to one another before the separation and the side of the family the grandparents come from. As we have seen, generally speaking, relations with the mother's parents are more intensive than relations with those of the father. When a marriage breaks down, contact with the mother's side of the family tends to become stronger, while ties with the father's side tend to weaken or even break. Divorce thus runs the risk of causing tensions that break family ties (Segalen, 2001b).

Grandparents who see their children's marriages break up have a fundamental role to play in the network of support that emerges at the time of a marital crisis, be it a separation or becoming a single parent. North American sociologists thus call them "restorative grandparents" (Williams & Nussbaum, 2001). As custody of the children is normally given to the mother, the maternal grandparents usually provide most emotional and practical support for the daughter and their grandchildren, helping with childcare, housekeeping, and financial assistance. Separated or divorced women receive more daily



help with childcare than women who are still married (Attias-Donfut & Segalen, 1998). Studies conducted with single-parent and reconstructed families show an increase in contact with the mother's side of the family (Harper, 2005), which can also be seen from the family situations of the children who took part in the present study. Of the eighteen children who live with a single parent or with step-parents, twelve are regularly looked after by their grandparents, in nine cases by their maternal grandmothers. If we include cases of cohabitation – since the greater part of these involve only a single parent – the extent of childcare provided by maternal grandmothers is even more impressive, with sixteen children being cared for by their maternal grandmothers, while only five receive support from paternal grandparents.

Alexandra, for example, who lives in a single-parent family headed by her mother, tells us that, when her parents split up, her mother received emotional support from her maternal grandmother: “My parents split up because my mother found out my father was carrying on with another woman, so *my granny helped to calm her nerves*. My mum was sad for two years. My granny helped to calm her nerves and to see that that was wrong”. Alexandra also reveals that his maternal grandparents provided vital practical support for her mother, even helping to bring her up. “It’s like this: I wake up really early in the morning, get ready for school, my grandparents come to pick me up and I stay with them in the morning, have lunch with them and then, after lunch, they take me to school. I arrive about three hours before going to school. I do this every day. My mother only takes me, when she has a day off, so most days it’s my grandparents”. It is the same for Gabriella, who lives with her mother and her step-father: “When my granny picks me up from school, she takes me home and stays with us there for a while until my mum goes to work. Then *I go to her house*. It’s the same every day, except weekends. But sometimes she comes when my mum has to work at the weekend, and sometimes, *she comes to clean the house*”.

André, who lives with his mother, sister and step-father, also remarks on the support provided by his maternal grandparents on a daily basis: “My sister and I never have lunch at home. It’s like this: we wake up *and go straight to granny’s*, we spend the morning there and have lunch with her, because she lives near the school and we can walk to school from there”, the boy says. In his map (below), we can see that, even though both sets of grandparents live in the same city, he has more contact with the maternal grandparents and



feels closest to them. As for his paternal grandparents, André has not marked a single box for the “personal contact” item (building in the middle), showing that he has little contact with them, mostly by telephone. And this is why he says he “more or less” likes his paternal grandparents: “Because I don’t see them, to tell the truth, I almost never see them”, he explains.

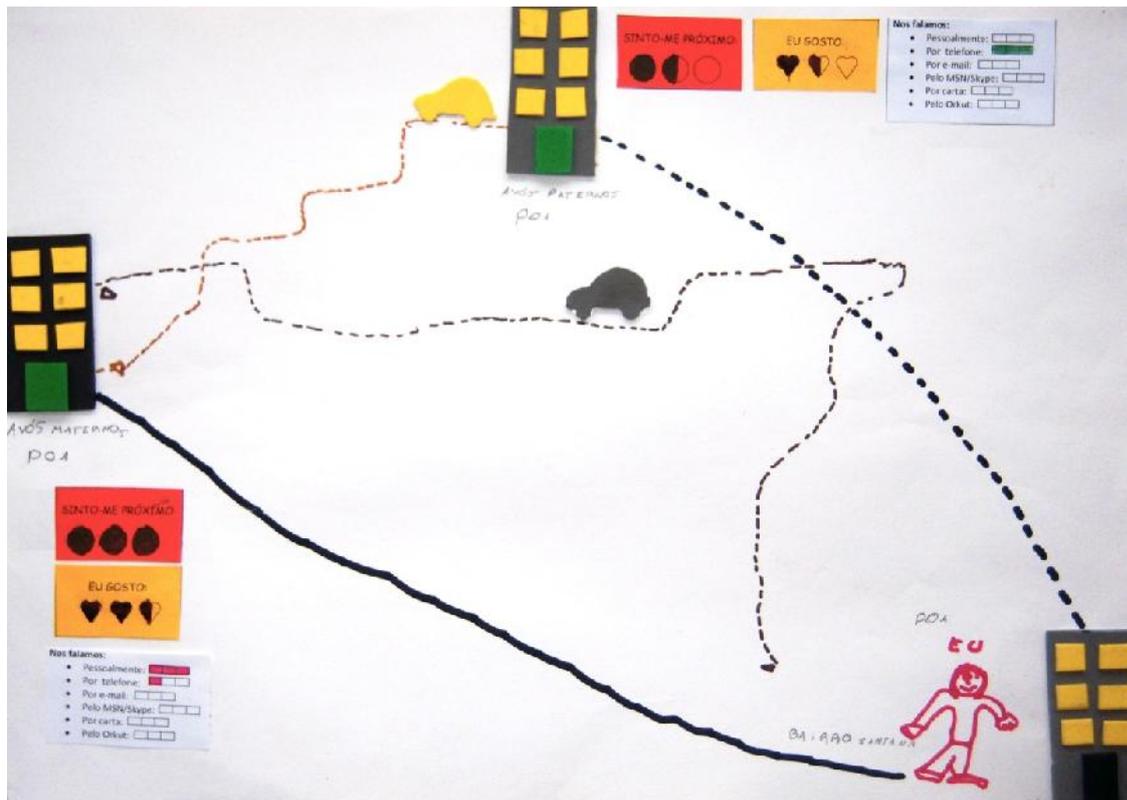


Fig.82: André's map of his grandparents' homes.

The support provided by grandparents during and after a divorce may also lead to the grandparents living together with the family on a permanent or temporary basis. Cohabitation tends to occur shortly after a divorce, when the separated children need to find a new home, look for a job, go back to university, or deal with childcare. The transition to being a single parent is normally accompanied by a significant reduction in family income, which may lead to poverty and even greater need of family support. In Canada, the UK and the USA, for example, the percentage of single-parent families living in poverty is three or four times greater than that for married couples with children (Singly, 2007). Since divorced men rarely have custody of the children, both single-parenthood and cohabitation with grandparents are situations mainly experienced by young mothers and tend to diminish as the children grow and the mothers themselves start a new family or become accustomed



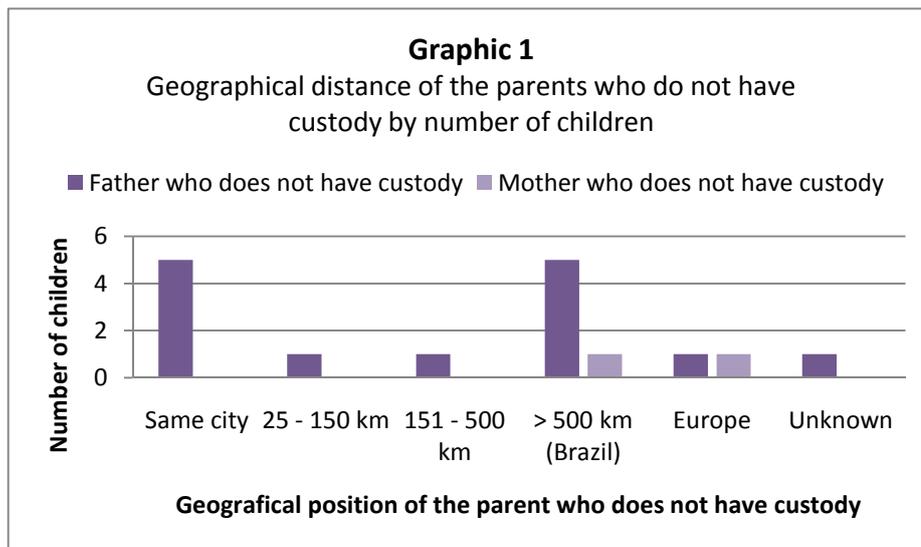
to the new family configuration. However, the support provided by grandparents can also be given to fathers, either when they are alone – Alexandra’s and José’s father went to live with their parents after the divorce – or when they are accompanied by small children.

Maria, for example, who lives with her father, went through a period when they lived with her grandparents, shortly after her parents separated: “I lived with my [paternal] grandparents for two or three years, I’m not sure exactly how long. I went there with my father. I lived there until I was four, I think. Then I came to live here in Porto Alegre with him”. Diego and Carol also lived for a short time with their grandparents, until their parents had arranged a new home for them. “When my apartment was being renovated, I went to live with my [paternal] grandmother, because they were doing up my father’s apartment. It was really, really old, full of woodworm and ants”, Diego remarks. Natasha went to live permanently with her mother and maternal grandmother, when her parents separated. “I was about three. My mother separated and also lost her job, so we moved to Porto Alegre and came to live with my grandmother”. For the grandparents, the help given to their children after the end of a marriage represents a prolongation of the parental role. A role that includes the well-being of their grandchildren as well as their children (Attias-Donfut & Segalen, 1998).

However, while, on the one hand, the support provided by grandparents strengthens ties with the members of the side of the family that has custody, it tends to weaken ties on the side that does not (Hawker et al., 2001; Roberto, 1990; Norris & Tindale, 1994; Drew & Smith, 2001). It is thus fair to say that divorce has two contradictory effects: it brings people closer together and pulls people apart. Under these circumstances, the very geographical distance between parents and children may increase substantially – as can be seen in the graph below<sup>43</sup> –, reducing the possibility of having contact with the parent who does not have custody. Lack of contact with the parents may bring with it serious consequences for intergenerational contact, since the absence of the middle generation makes it difficult to establish such relations. The distance may vary in degree, from sporadic occasional meetings, to cutting off relations altogether.

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<sup>43</sup> Children whose parents have joint custody are not included in this graph.



Lack of contact with grandparents often clouds and fades the mental image the children have of them, making it difficult for them to draw their grandparents. When asked to draw their grandparents, most children in this study began with those with whom they have more contact – i.e. the maternal grandmother (22 of the 36 children began with her and seven with the maternal grandfather) –, arguing that she was easier to draw: “I began with my [maternal] granny because *I can draw her better*. I go there nearly every day”, Pedro says. “I began with my granny on my mother’s side because I see her more often, so *I know how to draw her better*. I can remember what she looks like”, Amanda adds. For Alexandra, “the *other grandparents* [paternal ones] are much more difficult to draw because *the ones from here* [the maternal ones] have faces that are easier to draw”. Lion even said that he began his drawing “with the normal grandmother”, the one he stays with every day: “I don’t know. *I hardly ever see the other one* [the paternal grandmother], *and that’s why it’s easier to draw this one*”, the boy says.

This was also a relevant finding in the study conducted by Kornhaber and Woodward (1985) among North American children. In this study, the children who had more frequent contact with their grandparents had a more vivid mental image of them, which could be seen in the detailed nature of their drawings. They knew about what the grandparents liked, their personality, the way they dress, what they do with them. The children who had irregular contact or were remote from their grandparents produced lifeless or stereotypical drawings, while those who had no living grandparents either left the page blank or produced simple expressionless figures. “For children without known grandparents, trying to draw one



is like taking a test in a subject never studied”, as Kornhaber and Woodward (1985, p.35) put it.

When contact with one side of the family becomes minimal or non-existent, the children may even refuse to draw the grandparents or acknowledge their legitimacy. If, on the one hand, the biological tie that unites them is strong, this also needs to be fuelled by affection and regular contact. Fernanda, who has lived with her mother and maternal grandmother since she was born, decided not to include her paternal grandmother and other deceased grandparents in her drawing. When asked about this, she curtly replied that: “There was no room!”. However, she has drawn herself right next to her grandmother, and has painted over the rest of the page, so that no further place was available to be drawn. When asked what her paternal grandmother’s name was, she thinks for a while and then says “Oh, oh, oh...” until she remembers. She then decides to explain better: “OK. I didn’t draw my grandmother, because *I don’t see her any more*. It’s been a really, really long time! And, whenever I go to my father’s, we *just stay at home* and we never go to see her. We don’t even speak on the telephone”.



Fig. 83: Fernanda’s drawing of her grandparents, showing only the girl herself and her maternal grandmother.

Ashley also chose not to draw her paternal grandparents. Since she was born, she has lived with her mother and maternal grandparents. Although she sees her father twice a



month, she says that she does not see much of her paternal grandparents, even though they live in the same city:

Ashley – On these two visits, I don't often go there!

Researcher – And when do you go to your paternal grandmother's house?

Ashley – *When my father says we're going.* He decides where we go.



Fig.84: Map of Ashley's grandparents' homes.

Ashley's words, like those of Fernanda, reveal that it is the parents arrange contact between the girls and their grandparents, and Ashley illustrates this very well in her map, by showing that it is her father who picks her up at her house (gray building on the left) to take her "not very often" (dotted line) to her paternal grandmother's house (gray building on the right). On the few occasions when Ashley goes to her paternal grandparents', she remembers having "played with her cousin, with the doggy they have there and sometimes having lunch there". As we can see, she makes no reference to any activity explicitly involving her grandparents. This is perhaps why she says that she does not have much affection for them: "Because we almost never see each other and we don't talk much. I don't much like them...", she explains. When I ask her what her grandparents' names are, she replies: "Hummm, ahhhhhhhhh, pah! It's so long since I last saw them!", and is unable to remember. In her drawing of her grandparents (below), we can see that, apart from not showing the father's side of the family, she does not even indicate whether the



grandparents she has drawn are maternal or paternal ones<sup>44</sup>, thereby demonstrating in some fashion the singular role these two play: they are not only the maternal grandparents; they are *the grandparents*. “I didn’t draw them [the paternal grandparents] because there wasn’t room. [Silence] And also because I don’t know them very well”, she explains.



Fig.85: Ashley’s drawing of her grandparents, showing the girl herself and her maternal grandparents.

In the case of Maria, who lives with her father, the situation is the same, except that it is the ties with the mother’s side of the family that have weakened. Of the 36 children who participated in this research, 22 have parents who are separated or divorced. Of these, only three live exclusively with their father, and of these three, only Maria does not have very strong ties with her maternal grandparents. This may also occur because, while the other children’s mother is a big presence in their lives, even though one mother lives in the Midwest region of Brazil, Maria does not have much contact with her mother, who lives abroad. Her parents split up when she was round four years old and, after that, she lived for a short while with her mother, but finally ended up living with her father as she does today.

When asked if she has maternal grandparents, the girl promptly replies: “Yes. But I didn’t want to draw them, because then the drawing would be too cramped”. The examples of these children show that the supposed lack of space on the page is a tactic they use to justify, at least initially, the exclusion of some grandparents from their drawings. In Maria’s

<sup>44</sup> She did not write ‘paternal/maternal grandfather’ [‘avô paterno/materno’] or ‘maternal/paternal grandmother’ [‘avó paterna/materna’] as most of the other children did. She just wrote ‘grandfather’ [‘vô’] and ‘grandmother’ [‘vó’].



work, we can see that she has drawn herself and her paternal grandparents and decorated the rest of the Page with hearts, balloons, and butterflies. When asked about the names of her maternal grandparents, she responds: “Wait a minute. *I have to concentrate to answer*”. The same occurs when asked where they live: “To answer that question *I’ll have to concentrate even more! Hang on!*”, she says.



Fig.86: Maria’s drawing of her grandparents, showing only the girl herself and her paternal grandparents.

Just as Maria shows only her paternal grandparents in her drawing, so she draws only her father in the family drawing, not including the mother, with whom she only speaks on



Fig.87: Maria’s drawing of her family, not showing her mother.



the telephone. She says: “- Only the two of us live in that house. It’s my father who’s with me more”.

Both of her sets of grandparents live in cities some distance from Porto Alegre: São Luiz Gonzaga (500km away) and Pelotas (261km away). As her mother does not live in Brazil, Maria’s father takes her to see both the maternal and paternal grandparents during the school holidays. In her map, her mother’s house does not even appear. Although she has contact with both sides of the family, communication appears to be much smoother with her father’s side. When I ask her if she talks with her maternal grandparents, she says: “My MSN *doesn’t work very well*. My granny *isn’t available*, so, when I want to talk to her *she’s not there anymore...* They phone me. *I don’t have time...*”. When we speak about her relationship with her paternal grandparents, even though they live further away, she says: “Oh! *I ring them and they ring me! I’m more used to them, I ring them because I know them better!*”.



Fig.88: Detail of Maria’s map of her grandparents’ homes.

In Maria’s drawings, we can see that there is a strong relation between the way she represents her family and the way she represents her grandparents, and this was also found to be the case in the other children’s drawings. In cases of separation or divorce, when they do not acknowledge the father or mother who does not live with them to be a member of



the family, they also tend not to ascribe the same status to their paternal or maternal grandparents as they do to the grandparents on the side of the family of the parent who has custody. Looking at the drawings as a whole, of the ten children who did not represent one of the parents, only one drew the grandparents on both sides of the family in the drawing of the grandparents. Acknowledgement of grandparents as grandparents seems to be associated with the quality of the contact the children have with their own parents. When the divorced father or mother is not present in the child's life and does not exercise his or her expected role as a parent, the paternal or maternal grandparents also tend not to occupy the role of grandparents in the child's life, because the connection between them is fluid and unstable. It can be said, then, that the ties between grandparents and grandchildren are under pressure from two sides: on the one hand, the grandchildren depend on the ties between their parents and their grandparents to be strong enough to generate contact between the grandparents and the children; on the other, the grandparents depend on their own children to maintain a regular relationship with their grandchildren and to arrange relatively frequent meetings of these two generations. The generation in the middle, functions as a kind of "pivotal generation", responsible for linking the two points.

Returning to Fernanda's drawing of her family, we can see that, just as she does not represent her paternal grandmother in the drawing of her grandparents, scribbling over all



Fig.89: Fernanda's drawing of her family, not showing her father.



the blank space left, likewise, she does not show her father in the family drawing, leaving a space deliberately blank. In the girl's mind, apart from "not being around much", "he lives in another place, with [her] step-mother and [her] half brother", which is why she does not consider him to be part of the family.

The same can also be seen in the case of Alexandra, who left her father out of her drawing because he does not pay her the attention she deserves: "Every time I see him, I always ask to do something with him. He says yes, but just sits playing his guitar. And, when we're out, he says no. So, it seems he doesn't care much about me". The meeting with her father, who lives in another city (Lages, 347km from Porto Alegre), is not very regular and "sometimes, when he doesn't want to come and pick me up, he makes up an excuse and says that it will be too tiring", Alexandra explains. Because the contact with paternal grandparents is also not regular and the relationship is unsatisfactory – they see each other only when her father picks her up in Porto Alegre –, Alexandra does not include either her father in her drawing of the family, nor her paternal grandparents in her drawing of the grandparents: "I didn't draw them, because they are not very close to me. *I only go there for*



Fig.90: Alexandra's drawing of her family, not showing her father.

*holidays and my grandfather never speaks to me, my granny only cares about my father and, when my father is there, she only takes me to the seamstress. I never have fun at their place!*". However, Alexandra sees her mother's parents every day, and she manages to have



fun with them, as we can see from her drawing of a New Year's Eve party, with fireworks, colored balloons, lots of laughs and a heart inscribed with the words "I Love you [in English in original] granny and grandpa".



Fig.91: Alexandra's drawing of her grandparents, not showing her paternal grandparents.

For Alexandra, Fernanda, Ashley and Maria, the grandparents on the side of the family of the parent who does not have custody are distant figures, with whom they have slight contact. In some cases, albeit more rarely, there may be a complete break and intergenerational relations cease to exist. When the father who does not have custody completely loses touch with his children, the children also tend to lose the possibility of seeing their grandparents. The cases of Fernando and Natasha are good examples of this. Fernando, who has lived with his mother, twin sister, and maternal grandmother since he was born, has never known his father. As he has a small family, he drew the whole of his mother's side of the family for his family drawing, including his aunt and his great-aunt who live in the same building: "There are six people in my family. It's as if we all lived in the same house. We all live in the same three-storey building. Me, my mother, my sister, and my granny live together. My aunt lives on the floor above and my great-aunt on the floor below", Fernando explains. "I didn't draw my father, because I don't have one".

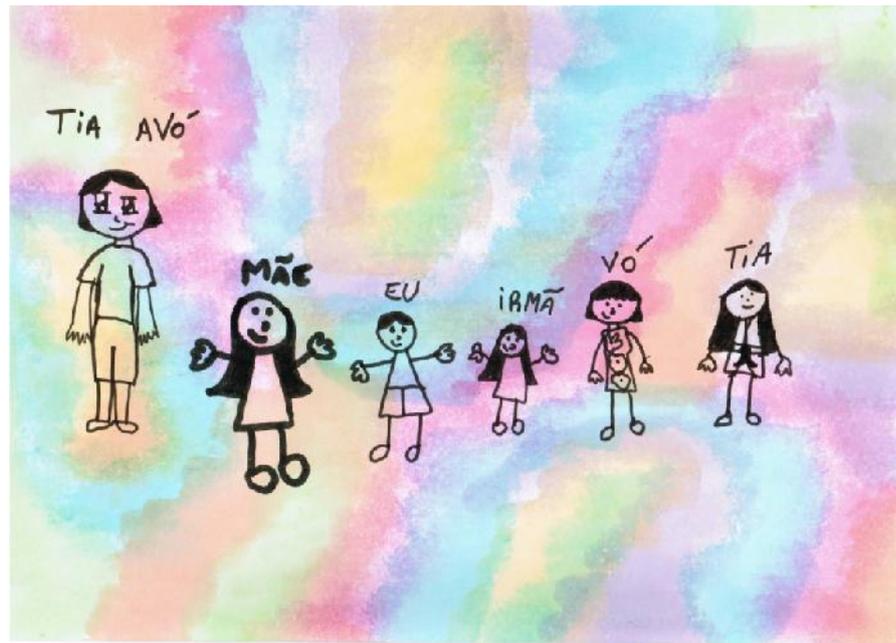


Fig.92: Fernando's drawing of his family, not showing his father.

As he does not know his father, neither does Fernando know his paternal grandparents: "The granny who lives with me is the only granny I have!" he exclaims. On his map, Fernando has written that he doesn't go to his paternal grandparents house because he doesn't know them. However, he did draw a line between his building and their house: "I'll put a car and a bus, because I could get there either way. Except I've never been there!", he explains.



Fig.93: Fernando's map of his grandparents' homes.



Natasha, who lives with her mother and maternal grandmother, has very similar circumstances to Fernando. Although she does know her father, she has not seen him very often: “I didn’t draw my father because he’s not around much. He lives in Rio de Janeiro [1547km from Porto Alegre] and I never see him”. As she is not very close to her father, she is not close to her paternal grandparents either. Natasha doesn’t even know them: “I don’t know their names, or who they are, so I can’t draw them”, she says. “When my mother and father split up, it was a long time before they... so I think they may have moved house, to somewhere a bit further away, so we don’t see them anymore. If I did meet them, it was when I was a baby, I think”. In her drawings, Natasha depicts only her mother’s side of the family.

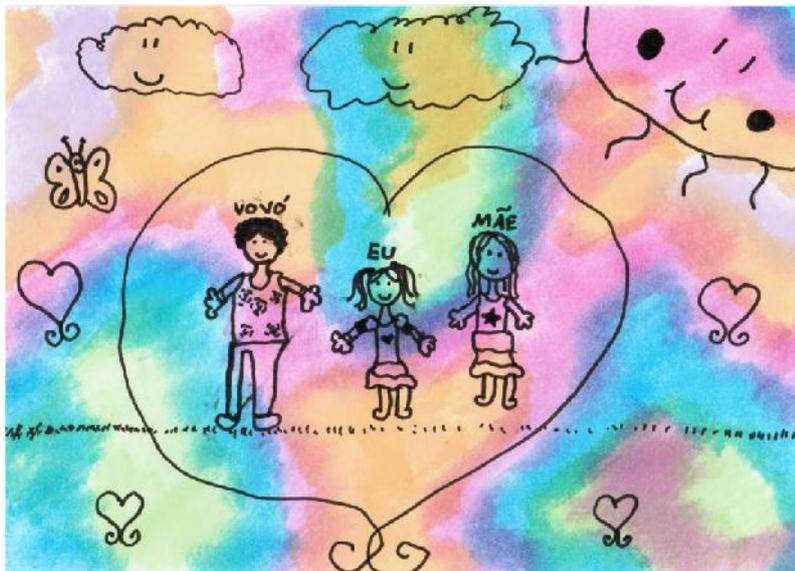


Fig.94: Natasha’s drawing of her family, not showing her father.



Fig.95: Natasha’s drawing of her grandparents, showing only her maternal grandmother.



Although Natasha does not know them, or only saw them when she was little, she says she is “curious to know what they’re like”: “I know nothing about them; I’ve never heard from them, so I know nothing. I don’t even know if my granny is still alive”, Natasha blurts out. In her map, like Fernando, Natasha also wants to include her paternal grandparents house as a place she does not know, but which she might visit: “I think I could get to their house by bus”, she says. The only thing that she knows about her grandparents is that “they live a long way away”, and the road to their house stretches the length of her sheet of paper. Although she does not know them, she relates she likes them and even feels a bit close to them: “I don’t like to judge people. I don’t know why we never meet”, she explains. In these cases, the non-inclusion of the grandparents is also related to the impossibility of drawing someone on has never seen.



Fig. 96: Natasha’s map of her grandparents’ homes.

Kornhaber (1996), confirming that ties between grandparents and grandchildren tend to be severely undermined when parents separate, has called such grandparents “the other victims of divorce” (p.120). The examples of Fernando and Natasha show that it is not only they who feel the loss of this link. However, while the grandparents organize themselves in associations that seek to re-establish intergenerational contact, the children continue to depend on the initiative of adults. In recent decades, there has been a rise in the number of



associations set up to help grandparents affected by the divorce of their children. In France, there is *École des grands-parents européens*; in the UK, *The Grandparents' Association*; in Germany, the *Bundesinitiative Großeltern*; in Italy, the *Associazione dei Nonni, Genitori dei Padri Separati*; in the United States, the *Grandparent Rights Organization*; and, in Spain, the *Asociación de Abuelos y Abuelas por la Custodia Compartida*, to cite just a few. These associations all attempt the same thing: to provide guidance for grandparents who have lost contact or now have extremely limited contact with their grandchildren, to run courses on this, to allow grandparents to exchange experiences, and to organize activities that seek to re-establish ties and strengthen the links between generations.

When the grandparents perceive that their ties to the future generation are being lost and that the middle generation does not help them establish contact, they are left with only one alternative: to go to family court to claim their right to visit their grandchildren and thus preserve their family line. This is not an easy process and tends only to occur when all consensual alternatives have been exhausted. This also reflects the difficulty of adjusting and the quarrels between family members. Lucas, who lost his mother when he was only five, lives in a situation of constant conflict between his maternal grandmother and his father, who has custody: “Before, my father used to take me to my grandmother’s house, but now she comes to pick me up, because the whole family is at odds”, the boy tells us. Although he did not wish to talk about the subject, Lucas explained that the problem blew up because both of them wanted custody:

Lucas – Before, I would always go to my granny’s house and spend less time with my father; now I spend more time with my father than with my granny.

Researcher – And why did you change your mind?

Lucas – Because, before, I used to think they were both right, about one of them wanting me more than the other, they both wanted me. Now I think differently, because she took my father to court.

Owing to the conflict existing between his maternal grandmother and his father, Lucas gradually stopped wanting to go to her house. At present, he says he visits her five or six times a year, because of a court order:

Lucas – She rings me and asks me, ‘Do you want to spend Sunday here?’. But the judge said she can only have me every other Saturday. And my dad says, ‘Oh, you can choose Saturday to stay with your father and, stay with your granny when you want’. So I go some weekends, when I feel like it.



Though a judge can enforce visiting rights, he or she cannot however ensure that there will be affection. Ties are clearly established and re-established over time, with frequency of contact being a fundamental factor in the establishment of new ties. However, depending on the amount of time the grandparents have been estranged from their grandchildren and the reasons for this, these ties may be difficult to re-establish, especially when the middle generation does not intervene or does not have any ties with the grandparents itself.

Lucas – My father says, ‘Look Lucas, you’d better go there, so they can’t keep on at me about you never visiting them’. But I don’t feel like going there. She rings me and says, ‘Do you want to come here?’. And I say to her (in an angry voice), ‘I’ll ring when I want to!!!’

In his family drawing, in which Lucas says he is drawing the “nicer” people and the ones he has “more contact” with, he has not included anyone on his mother’s side, but only people he has contact with through his father:



Fig. 97: Lucas’s drawing of his family, showing only his father’s side. [Almost all my family].

According to Drew and Smith (2001), a break in relations with grandchildren can have a serious impact on the health of the grandparents. In their North American study, these authors found that 44% of them say report problems with their physical health and 46% are emotionally disturbed because they have lost contact or have diminished contact with their grandchildren. In the most serious cases, Drew and Smith found effects comparable to those



that accompany periods of mourning. However, different from cases in which a death has occurred, which is a definitive separation, many grandparents are not able to complete the work of mourning for a relationship with a grandchild that they know to be still alive. When a child is born and the parents become grandparents, they do not imagine that they may one day lose this role. When an intergenerational break occurs and the middle generation is unable or unwilling to promote such contact, many grandparents experience feelings of powerlessness and lack of fulfillment, which is also reflected in the experiences of some of the children, as the stories of Natasha and Fernando aptly illustrate.

The point of contact between grandparents and grandchildren is not only built up by the children, but also by sons and daughters-in-law. It is the parent who has custody – normally the mother – who determines “the nature and the depth of relations” (Attias-Donfut & Segalen, 1998, p.154), increasing or reducing the number of opportunities for contact between their children and their ex-parents-in-law. When relations between them are cordial and positive, the former daughter-in-law may, herself, ensure that there is intergenerational contact between grandchildren and the father’s side of the family, thereby lessening the impact of the divorce. But this does not occur when there is conflict between daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law (Hawker et al., 2001).

Leonardo, who lives with his mother and five-year-old sister, says that he spends little time with his paternal grandmother: “I rarely see her. About once every four months”. As we can see in the detail from his map, contact with his grandmother is mediated exclusively by his father [‘pai’]: “When I go to her place, which is not often, it’s him who takes me”, the boy explains. Leonardo also tells us very little about her: he colored in less than one for the “in person” and “by telephone” items. When I ask him why it is only his father who arranges for them to meet, Leonardo says: “My



Fig. 98: Detail of Leonardo’s map of his grandparents’ homes.

mother never takes me there. *They don’t get on and won’t speak to one another... I’m not*





Carol – My granny and my father fell out. So I see her when I go with my mum or with my other granny on the bus.

Researcher, seeing that she had filled in two boxes for the item “by telephone” – And when do you talk on the telephone?

Carol – When I’m at my mother’s. Once, she went to Chile and she brought me lots of things back, so, she said: ‘Do you want to come here to pick them up? Or, would you like me to go there?’ And I said: ‘OK, fine!’ And sometimes, she’s missing me and she invites me over. But I do all of this at my mother’s house. Sometimes, when I’m at home, I contact her through MSN. My father’s fallen out with her, so she can’t ring me there.

Grandparents may also collaborate with their ex-daughters-in-law. Although the support provided by the maternal grandmother is usually greater than that offered by the paternal grandmother – even before a divorce –, when relations are amicable between them, a young separated mother may also ask for help with childcare from her ex-mother-in-law. This happens mostly when she does not have a very good relationship with her own mother, or when her parents are unable or unwilling to care for their grandchildren, or when the geographical distance is too great for them to provide much support (Attias-Donfut, 2002). On the other hand, the paternal grandparents may want to help her, as this ensures frequent contact with their grandchildren and improves their resources and living conditions. Many grandparents maintain relations with their ex-daughters-in-law because they believe that their sons are not capable of allowing them free access. According to Johnson (1998), the grandparents who help their ex-daughters-in-law with childcare do not think of them as “their child’s ex-wife”, but as “the mother of their grandchildren”.

Melissa is a good example of this. Her mother has custody of her and her father has been living in France since she was four. They are in regular contact, talking “on the computer, by *Skype* and *MSN* and they can also see each other via the *webcam*”. Probably because her mother and her paternal grandparents get on well, because the latter make up for the support that their son cannot give in person, or because the maternal grandparents live in another city, there is a strong network of support on the father’s side of the family, focused primarily on the grandmother:

Melissa – For me, my grandmother, oh! If I didn’t have my grandmother, I don’t know what would become of me! My grandmother does everything: she takes me to school and to the psychologist... She does everything! If it weren’t for my grandmother, I don’t know what I would do, because my mother has to work, although now she has more time because she changed jobs. She’s only working at one clinic. So she has a bit more time. But before, I don’t know, because she didn’t have time even to... She would leave home at 9h, work from 10h to 19h30min, and could never take me to school, unless I arrived there at 8am and waited!!!



Her map shows the frequency with which she visits her paternal grandparents' house, marked by a strong black line, which also means that she feels very close to them:

Melissa – I drew a very thick line because I am always with my granny. Even though I don't stay the night there often, I'm there almost all the time...

Researcher – What time is that?

Melissa – In the morning before I go to school. School doesn't count. Then, I go there after school and only leave when I've done my homework and all that! So, I do everything with my grandmother! I only do a few things with my mother!

Melissa goes to her maternal grandparents' house (the red one) on the weekends:

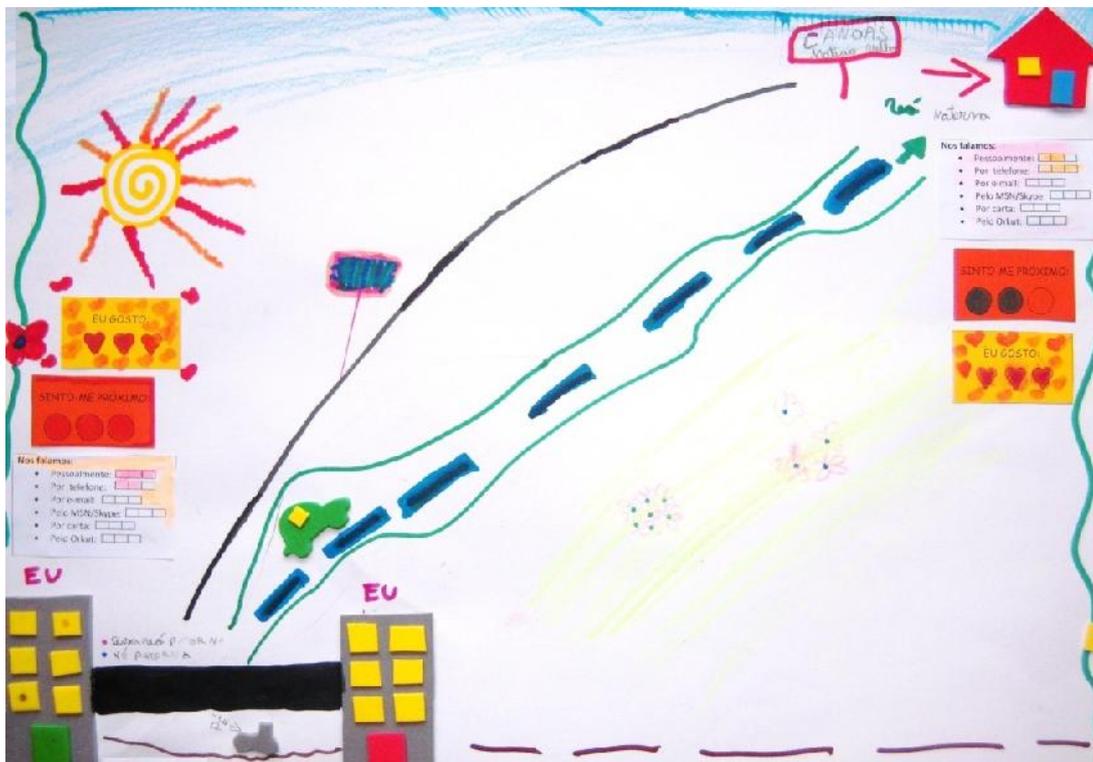


Fig. 100: Map of Melissa's grandparents' homes.

This is also happening with Nanda. Her parents have joint custody and only her paternal grandparents (who are divorced) are still alive. The grandmother, who lives in the same city as her, helps her son and ex-daughter-in-law to bring up their grand-daughter, caring for her when they are unable to do so, visiting Nanda at both her father's and her mother's houses. In Nanda's map (below), we can see that the paternal grandmother (building at the top on the left) goes from one residence to the other (both the buildings located in the lower part of the map). At the top of the sheet, Nanda has written: "She visits me in both places". "Sometimes [the grandmother] comes by bus" at others "my mum or my dad take me to her place".



Nanda – I see my granny some weekends, holidays and when she takes care of me and my cousin. Sometimes, at the weekend, or when my mum has a meeting and arrives late, my mum asks her to come and pick me up. My mum sometimes asks my granny to come to my house to look after me and, sometimes, instead of going straight home, she comes to pick me up from school and takes me to her place, but then we go by taxi.

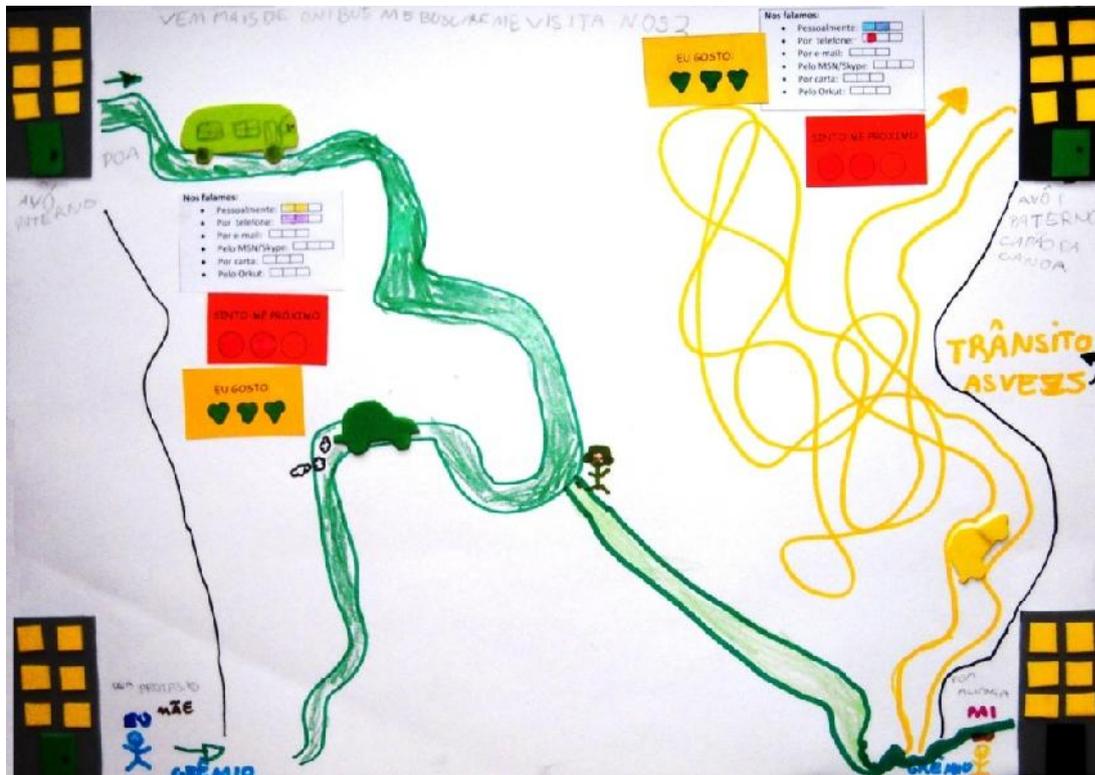


Fig. 101: Nanda's map of her grandparents' homes.

In Nanda's case, the contact with her paternal grandmother changed somewhat after her parents got divorced; both parents continue to actively promote these meetings. This also arises from the frequency with which both parents are with their daughter: "I stay with my father on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and the rest of the time with my mother, and, on Friday, I stay with whoever's turn it is to have me for the weekend", Nanda explains. When the end of the relationship of man and wife does not lead to a decline in the relation between parent and child, the ties between grandparents and grandchildren do not seem to undergo any major changes and the level of contact between them may even be similar to that enjoyed by children living in nuclear families. This tends to occur, mainly, in families where the parents have joint custody of the children, or in those where both parents see their children regularly and frequently, since the greater proximity of both parents increases the likelihood of more frequent contact with both sets of grandparents. Let's see the situation of Diego and Daniele.



Diego's parents have joint custody. His father has remarried and his mother is a single mother. He has a more or less equal amount of contact with both sides of the family:

Diego – I spend two days a week with my mum, two days with my father and one weekend with each. I go to my paternal granny's every Tuesday and Thursday, because I have school in the morning and I have lunch there. I go to my maternal granny's every time that I am with my mum. And sometimes she asks me to go and pick something up at my granny's and I stay there longer than she asked.

In the map detail below, we can see that Diego has relatively regular contact with both sides (as signified by the black line). As his mother and grandmother live in the same building, he can go to his maternal grandmother's every time he stays with his mother. In the case of his paternal grandparents, "there are days when [he goes there] from his father's house and others when [he goes there] from his mother's house". In both cases, it is always his father who takes him.

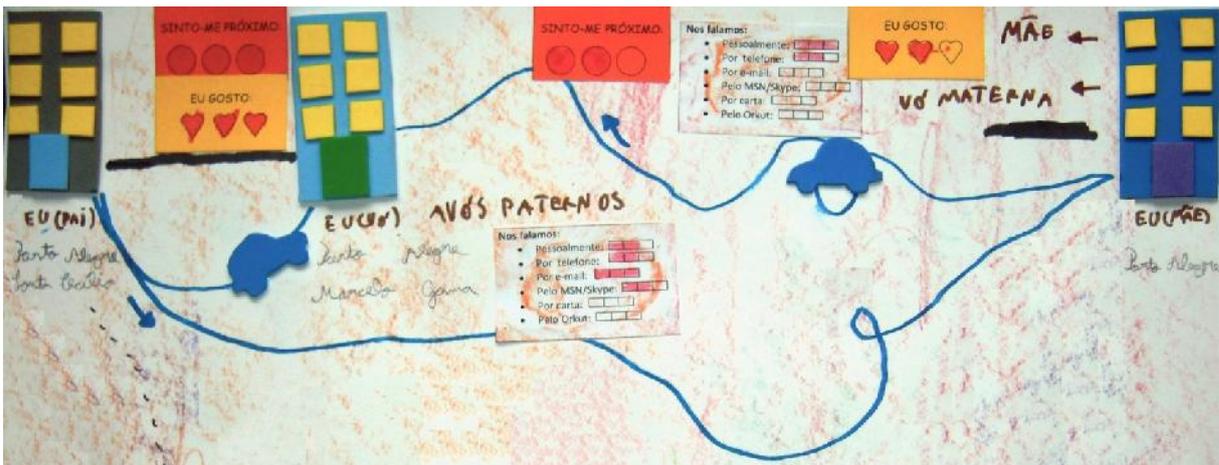


Fig. 102: Detail of Diego's map of his grandparents' homes.

Daniele, whose parents have joint custody, spends three days a week with his father and two with his mother and also has plenty of contact with both his maternal and paternal grandparents:

Daniele – I go a lot to my maternal granny's! Every Sunday! I go there for lunch with my mum and I spend the whole afternoon with them... I see my paternal granny every Tuesday, when my dad plays football, and my granny comes to take care of me and my brother.

Daniele also keeps in touch quite regularly by phone with both sides, calling her maternal grandmother "to find out if [she can] come round or take her to the beach" and, his paternal grandmother, when she has homework and she can't do by herself or when she



wants to invite her round. “I ring up and I say: ‘Granny. Can I spend the night at your place?’ And, if not, I say, ‘Granny. Do you want to go to church?’, and we meet there”, she says.

As the ties between these children and their parents and grandparents alike remain strong after the divorce of the parents, they acknowledge both sides as playing a role in the family, representing both parents in the family picture and both sets of grandparents, differently from the children who do not acknowledge the parental status of the parent who does not have custody. All of the thirteen children who included both their divorced parents in the family drawing also included their grandparents. However, this does not mean that the contact with each side of the family is necessarily equal. Children who keep in regular touch with their father, while being mainly in the care of their mother, tend to maintain regular relations with their maternal grandparents, because of the network of support. The balance between regularity of contact and the feeling that their parents and grandparents belong to their respective positions in the family is determined by the children themselves, who evaluate and give meaning to these relations according to the quality of the meetings, the way they related to one another before the separation, the biological ties that bind them, the degree of affinity between them, and the perception of a satisfactory contact or even a sense of family duty. Lion, for example, who lives with his mother alone and spends some weekends with his father, represents his family as follows:



Fig. 103: Lion's drawing of his family, showing himself, his father, and his mother.



In the drawing, he is looking at a photograph that appears to preserve the image of his family when it was united: he is standing between his father and his mother. Since he was four years old, which was when his parents split up, Lion has been moving back and forth between one and the other: “I live with my mother and my dog, but occasionally I go to sleep at the house where my father and his girlfriend live”. During the week, when he is with his mother, it is the maternal grandmother who cares for him: “I can see that she looks after me!” he cries. Sometimes, Lion has lunch at school and goes to his grandmother’s house afterwards; sometimes he goes “there in the morning and [has lunch] with her. So, I stay there the whole day”, Lion explains. He sees his paternal grandmother much less, only “when there’s a party or when my father takes us there for lunch... My paternal granny never leaves home. I only see her if we go there. She never comes to our place. We don’t see each other much”. In his map, we can see that the contact with the father’s side of the family (blue house) is mediated exclusively by his father; and although Lion identifies this as being something rather infrequent (dotted line) – which leads him to feel closer to his maternal grandmother (grey building) – the boy demonstrates that he likes her a lot, because family ties often make up for infrequency of contact: “I love all my grandparents. They’re my family, right?! They like me and I like them”.

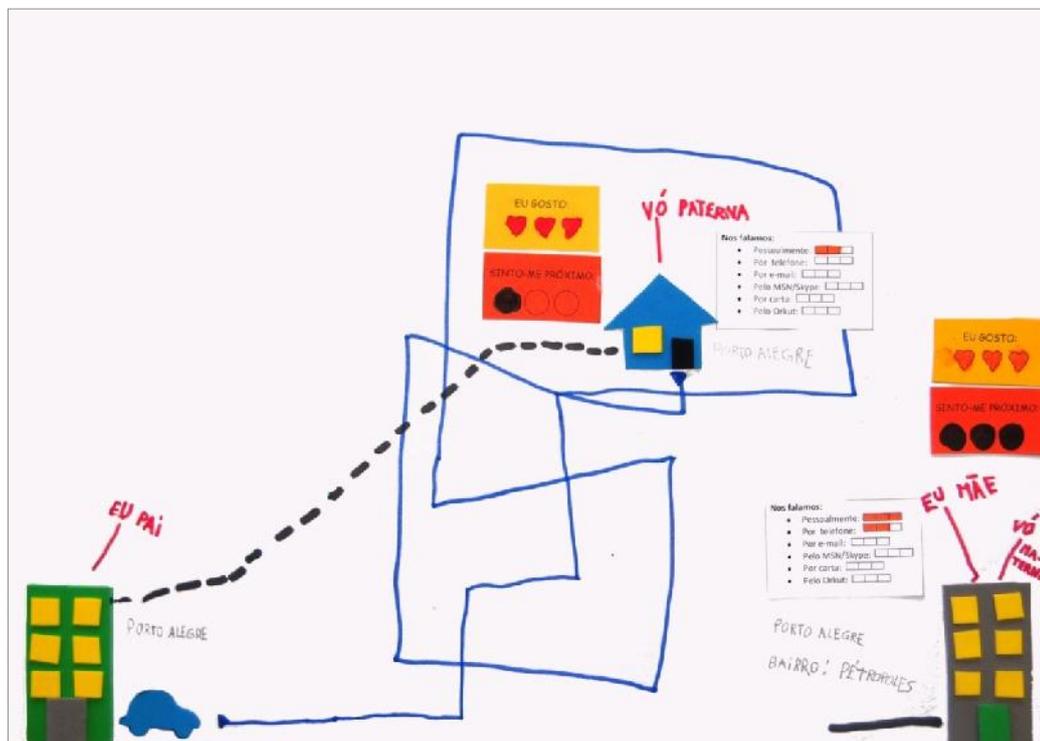


Fig. 104: Detail of Lion’s map of his grandparents’ homes.



Given this, Lion acknowledges that he has grandparents on both sides of the family:



Fig. 105: Lion's drawing of his grandparents, showing his paternal and maternal grandmothers. His grandfathers are already deceased.

The case of Pedro illustrates this well. After his parents separated, he started to divide his time between his mother's and his father's houses: "I spend all week with my mother and, on Fridays, my father picks me up from school and takes me to school on Mondays", he explains. While Pedro is with his mother, his maternal grandmother is a big presence. She comes round "almost every day".

Pedro – It's like this: I'm at home. If I don't go to school for lunch I go to my granny's. And when my mum has to work late, I always go to her place after school.

Although he has much more frequent contact with his maternal grandmother, who helps Pedro's mother with his daily care, he does not neglect to visit his paternal grandmother:

Pedro – I go there, but not so often. I go there sometimes, some weekends. My granny invites me to go and I sleep over, me and my dad. Sometimes my granny comes to my dad's house for a barbecue or a pool party.

In his drawings (below), we can see that Pedro grants both his father and his paternal grandmother a place in the family:



Fig. 106: Pedro's drawing of his family, showing his father and mother.



Fig. 107: Pedro's drawing of his grandparents, showing both his paternal and maternal grandmothers.

As we have seen, different arrangements in contact with the two sides of the family following a divorce or separation depend on numerous factors and may vary according to side of the family, quality and regularity of intergenerational contact, geographical proximity, the tone and circumstances of the divorce, and also the family relationship itself. Everything appears to indicate that when the divorced parents establish a negotiated relation with the former spouse and her children, the grandparents on both sides continue to have regular contact with their grandchildren, even though it is the mother's side that offers most support. When the break-up is bitter or when one of the parents is absent,



contact tends to be lost and grandparents and grandchildren become distanced from one another. These ties thus depend substantially on the way the day-to-day life of the family is organized. Parenthood is not an agreement made between the two parents and the child alone: its negotiation determines the degree of involvement of the mother's and father's side of the family in the lives of the children. But it is not only the divorce of parents that determines intergenerational relations. Even though it has received little attention, divorces in the grandparents' generation also bear considerable weight.

### 3.3 *When grandparents divorce*

Nanda – My grandparents are separated, so I drew them far apart from each other. (See drawing below). They split up because my grandfather lied. He said that my granny was seeing someone else, when in fact he was. So, he lied to his children, to my relatives, to my father, and my aunt, that my granny, who is their mother, was seeing other people, when in fact it was him. So, because of this lie, they separated. [...] My granny told this story to me and my niece over breakfast, because I sleep a lot at her place. So, over breakfast, she told us, because we were always asking, 'Granny!, Why did you and grandpa split up?' And granny would never tell us... but then, one day, she decided to tell us the story.



Fig. 108: Nanda's drawing of her grandparents, showing her paternal grandmother and paternal grandfather on opposite sides of the page.

Although it has apparently become natural for contact with members of the family to be lost as a result of a divorce or separation that occurs in the middle generation, (Norris &



Tindale, 1994), it should be noted that the marriages of many grandparents also come to an end. As Attias-Donfut (2002) points out, it was the men and women now in their 50s and 60s who were the first generation to make divorce something commonplace, around three decades ago, under the influence of some important changes in contemporary family life. The new attitude to relationships may have led many grandparents' marriages to break down when they were still in early adulthood, but there are also some who divorced later, when they were already at a relatively advanced age, when the children are grown up and their grandchildren are running around the house.

The divorce rate is not only high in the younger sector of the population. It has also increased in the over 60s age group, who, owing to greater longevity and changes in lifestyle, have chosen to restructure their conjugal relations and attain more personal satisfaction even when elderly. According to data produced by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2010a), between 2003 and 2006, the numbers filing for divorce in this age group rose by 27.8% in the case of men and 29.3% in the case of women. And it is because many grandparents have themselves been through a marriage breakdown that they can, in most cases, play a stabilizing role in the divorce of their children (Segalen, 2001b). The impact caused by divorce in the grandparents' generation can also be felt in other generations and one important factor is the time it occurs. Family conflicts in childhood can leave their mark on subsequent generations and, when grandparents were not themselves present in the lives of their children, the likelihood of a complete breakdown in relations occurring increases. When the children of the divorced couple themselves become parents, relations do not necessarily improve.

Carol, for example, does not know her maternal grandfather. When he and her grandmother split up, her mother was still a child: "He left my mum when she was little. She stayed with my granny. So, by the time I was born, he had already gone to live in Ipanema [a Porto Alegre neighborhood]. Sometimes, he talks to my granny, but never with my mother or with me". As ties between father and daughter broke down over time, Carol never had any contact with her grandfather: "I only know him from photographs, but *I've never been able to meet him*". Carol's harbors great resentment that her grandfather has never shown any interest in her and this is why she says that she has "no wish" to meet him: "My grandmother has told him I was born, but *he's never wanted to see me*. He never leaves



Ipanema. He's never wanted to see me! In fact, I think he has two daughters, who I haven't met either. Not even my mother has met them", she explains. It is possible that Carol's maternal grandfather is more devoted to the family he set up after the divorce, which happens with many men who live in reconstituted families (Attias-Donfut, 2002). Despite knowing that he is her biological grandfather and that he lives in the same city as her, there are no ties of affection between them: "I don't consider him my grandfather!", Carol concludes. She does not include him in her drawing of her grandparents.

It is the same with Baiano. Of his maternal grandmother's divorce, he knows that his grandfather "disappeared, abandoned her and left". Baiano reveals himself to be outraged by this situation, since he cannot overlook the fact that his grandmother had to bring all her children up alone: "My grandpa abandoned my granny and went to Paraná. He left my granny to bring up her children alone. So, *he has disappeared, so far as I am concerned! Disappeared!* [...] I didn't draw my grandfather, because *he means nothing to me! Nothing!* He left my granny to bring up her children alone! Alone!", he exclaims in indignation. In the drawing reproduced here, we can see that he portrays his grandmother as a super-

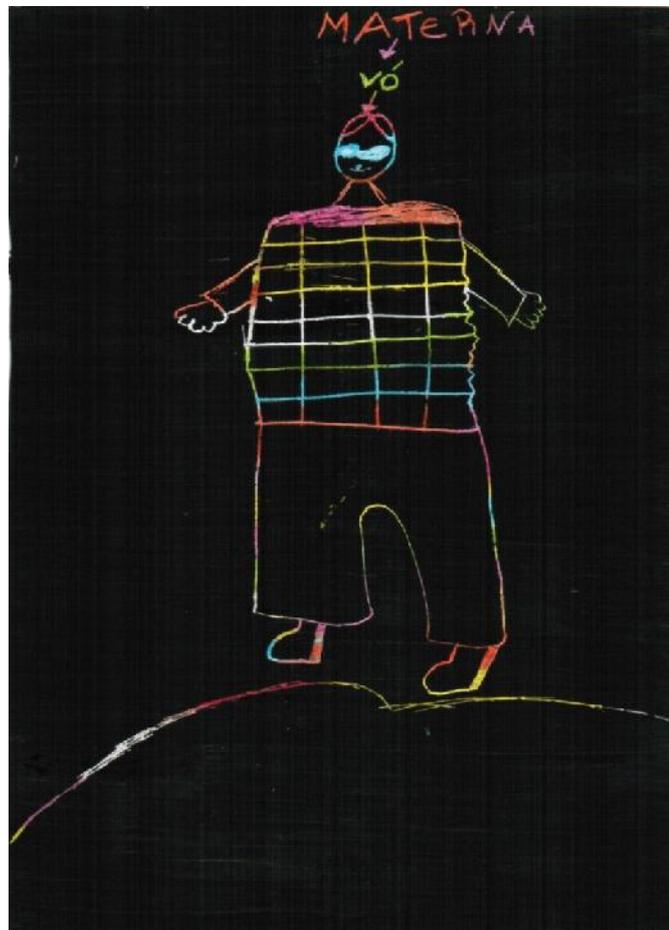


Fig. 109: Baiano's drawing of his grandparents.

granny, taking up the whole of the page. As Baiano finishes his drawing, he cries out: "My granny's wearing sunglasses! She looks lovely! Happy with life!".

In the maps drawn by Baiano (left) and Carol (right), we can see that, as there is practically no contact whatsoever between them – Baiano says he has spoken on the telephone with his grandfather only once – there is likewise no affection: they have not filled in any hearts for their grandfathers.

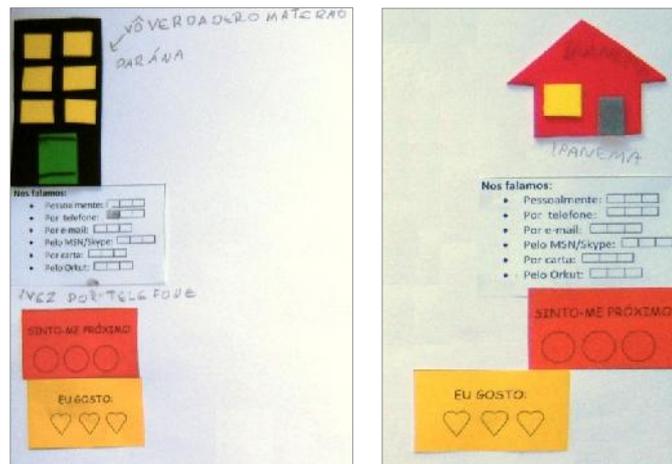


Fig. 110: Detail of the maps of Baiano's and Carol's grandparents' homes.

The reason for the loss of contact seems to be an important variable in determining ties of affection. Carol feels rejected by her grandfather, while Baiano disapproves of his. In the previous section, we saw that Natasha filled in one heart for her paternal grandparents, even though she has never met them. To justify this, Natasha says that she doesn't like to judge people, since she does not know what led them to split up, which is not the case with Baiano and Carol. These children have a clear reason for not granting their maternal grandfathers any hearts:

Carol – To my mind, a grandfather deserves three hearts when he is good to us. But my grandfather gets none *because he's not interested in me*.

Baiano – For me to like a grandfather *he has to deserve it*, he has to show you love and affection. *He has to be good to us*. That's why I don't like my grandfather who lives in Paraná.

When the children of the divorced couple harbor powerful resentment towards their father and there are no positive ties between them, it is very probably that they will also have little to do with their grandparents, if they even know them. The breakdown in contact between them may affect the whole side of the family. Carol and Baiano are good examples of this, which can also be found in Pedro's family history. Since his paternal grandparents split up, the bond between his father and his grandfather broke down. Pedro does not know his paternal grandfather's name or where he lives. In his map, therefore, he hesitates: "I don't know if *my father's father* lives in a house or an apartment", he says; and, when he writes "paternal grandfather" on the page, he does so in an expressionless fashion using a dull color, different from the others (blue building). In his map, we can also see that there is



no route leading to his paternal grandfather's house: "I've spoken to him on the telephone sometimes, when my father calls, but I've never been there, *because my father doesn't like him much*. It's because when my father was small... [he pauses], no, forget it. It's better I don't tell", he concludes. Pedro has also not included his paternal grandfather in his drawing of his grandparents.



Fig. 111: Pedro's map of his grandparents' homes.

When grandparents divorce at an advanced age the break tends to be less abrupt and contact 'only' undergoes alteration in regularity. However, the quality of the relationship also tends to be modified, especially when the children and grandchildren disapprove of a divorce or a remarriage on the part of the grandparents: while women, even when remarried, continue to take an interest in their children from previous relationships, men concentrate on the family they are building with their new wives, loosening ties with their original family (Attias-Donfut, 2002). In the sample used for this research project, the reduction in or loss of contact with grandparents after a separation is predominantly with the grandfathers. The children who witness the divorce of their grandparents may also accompany their suffering or reject the choice of a new partner: "My grandparents separated during the holidays recently. I can see that my grandpa is OK, but my granny isn't very happy about it", Marcelo remarks. For João, the separation of his grandparents created



a difficult situation, since his grandfather “got himself a girlfriend”. “He shouldn’t have done that! He should be single, like my granny, because they were married and they separated. And, for me, it was *something very sad. I didn’t want them to separate*. Now, whenever I look at her I see a totally different person from what my granny used to be!”, he notes sadly.

In his map, we can see that, although he continues (building with red door) to have contact with both his maternal grandfather (red house), and his maternal grandmother (building in the top right-hand corner), the regularity of contact has not been the same since

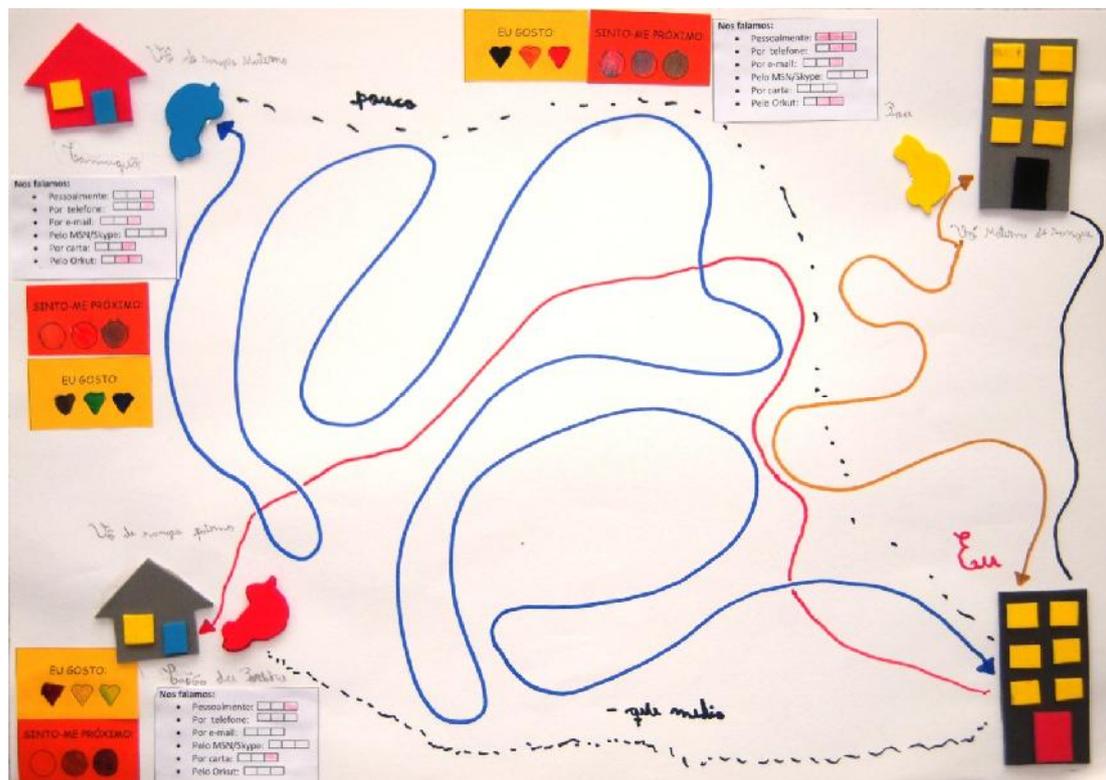


Fig. 112: João’s map of his grandparents’ homes.

they divorced and his grandfather moved to another city. Of the possible means of communication – face-to-face, by telephone, by Orkut, MSN, letter or *email* – we can see that his relationship with his grandmother is very active, which makes him feel closer to her: “I don’t talk that much with my [maternal] grandfather. I talk more with my granny. I talk a lot with her. Every day!”. The grandmother, even when divorced, continues to be the main source of intergenerational contact:

João – My granny talks more to me. She’s always coming round. Today, for example. This morning I went to see my granny at my mum’s office, because they work together and so I always see her when I’m going to extra lessons or Sunday school. And she always comes to my birthday parties, talks to me, helps me.



As João's maternal grandfather lives in another city (Camaquã, 127km from Porto Alegre), they see little of each other, which means that all the boy hears when they do meet is: "Boy! How you've grown!".

Diego, whose maternal grandparents are divorced, also has warmer relations with his grandmother. While he has a lot of face-to-face and telephone contact with her (blue building, in the upper right-hand corner), contact with his maternal grandfather is practically non-existent, occurring only by telephone (gray house, in Viamão, 40km from Porto Alegre):

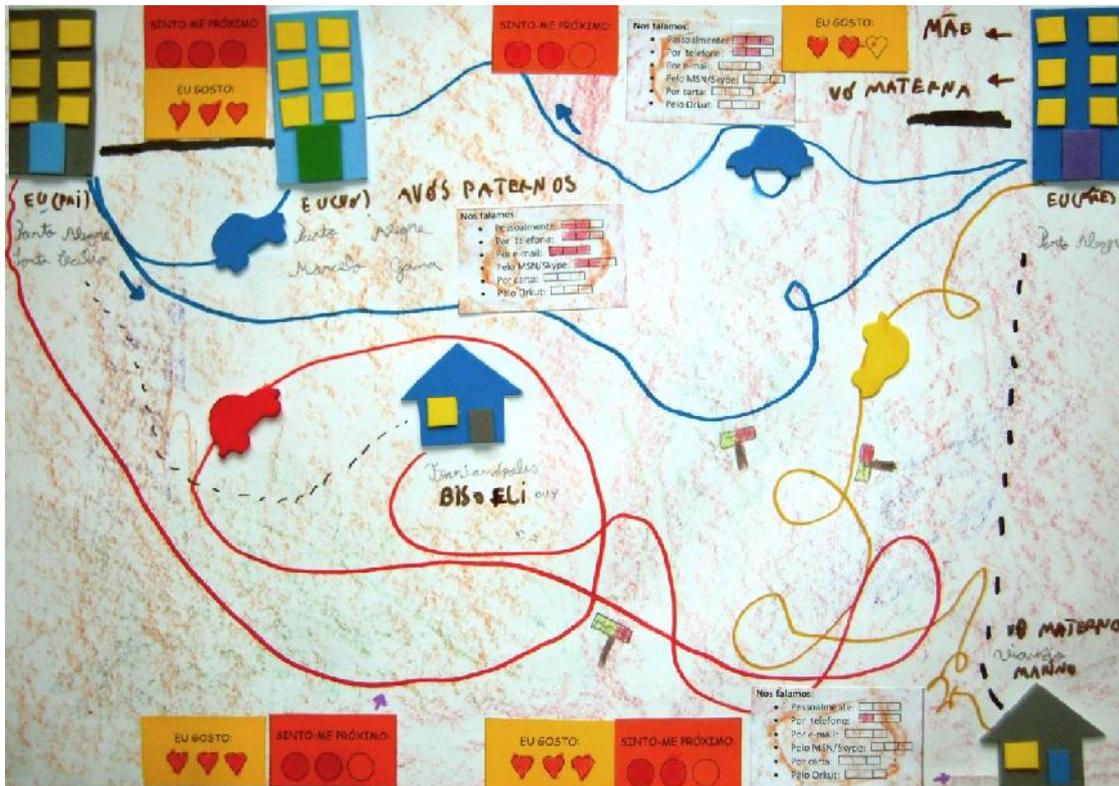


Fig. 113: Diego's map of his grandparents' homes.

"Oh, I don't see that grandpa very often! Very little! Hummm... [thinks] I almost never go there! The last time I went there was in... [thinks] 2005 or 2006, or thereabouts". When I ask Diego if he knows why he sees him so little, the boy says: "I don't know! It's a long way and it takes a long time to get there! And my mother doesn't want to go!". As Diego has very little to do with this grandfather, he knows very little about his life:

Diego – He calls once in a while, but not often. It's always him who calls. He calls my mother and sometimes wants to speak with me. So I speak to him, but I don't know much about him... He asks lots of things about me, but it's just about how I am and how school is going.



The reduction in contact with a divorced grandparent is also something that Kátia has gone through. When she draws her family, she includes her mother, her father, her three brothers (the older two of whom are only brothers on her father's side), her maternal grandparents and her paternal grandmother. She says she has not drawn her grandfather on her father's side because she doesn't see him very often.

Kátia – We see my grandpa once in a while... [thinks] Oh, I don't know, we don't see that much of him! He lives on the other side of town! I've never been there. I know that he lives in Porto Alegre, but I don't know if it's far away or nearby. I think it's a really long way away.

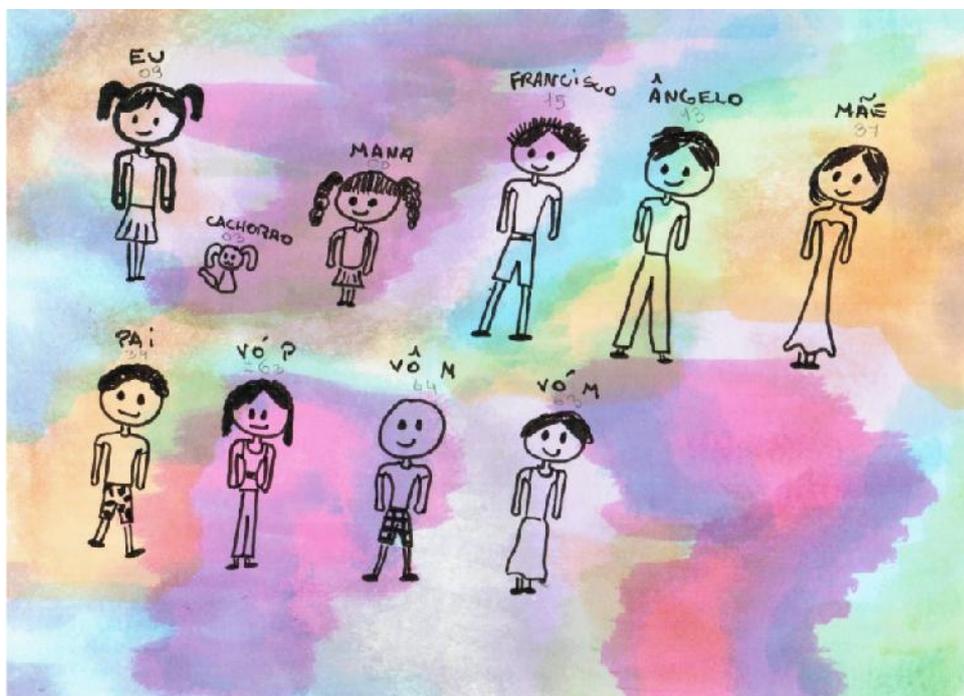


Fig. 114: Kátia's drawing of her family, not showing her paternal grandfather.

The last time she remembers having seen her grandfather was when she was six years of age: "I only see him once in a while, every three years or so". The lack of contact means that Kátia cannot remember what he looks like, which also "explains" why he does not appear in her drawing of her grandparents: "I don't remember what my paternal grandfather looks like. I don't remember... it's been a long time since I last saw him! I can't even remember his face or what he's like!", she explains. When I ask her why they see so little of each other, she replies: "Oh, I don't know! It must be something to do with my father". If Kátia does not know much about her paternal grandfather, she clearly shows that she knows her other grandparents very well. When she explains her drawing of her grandparents, she gives details of their lives together:



Kátia – This is my maternal grandpa [on the right]. He loves to play with me and he comes to my house a lot. My maternal granny [in the middle] and my paternal granny [on the left], who always bring presents and have a cat [in the background].

Researcher – What kind of presents does she bring you?

Kátia – She gives me a lot of clothes, which is why I drew a C&A bag [at the top]. I also drew a carrot, an orange and a potato, because I love growing things in my grandfather's vegetable garden [at the top]. This here [in the corner on the right] is a games cupboard at my grandpa's house and this is me ['eu']. I drew my paternal grandmother with a hairstyle because when she goes to my place I love to comb her hair and do it up in pigtails.



Fig. 115: Kátia's drawing of her grandparents, not showing her paternal grandfather.

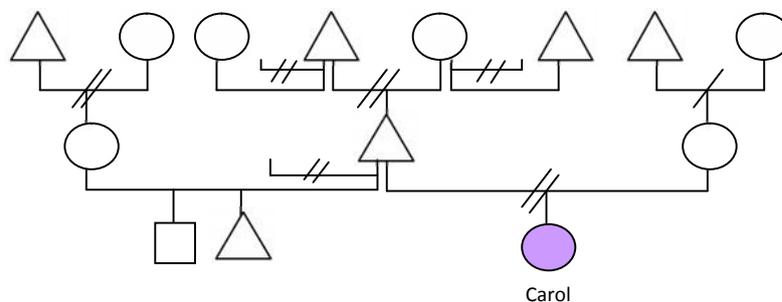
In one of our final meetings, Kátia says that she has been reunited with her paternal grandfather: "It had been so long that I hadn't seen him! I went to school... it was a Thursday, and when I got home, my father told me. I didn't know! It had been three years since I'd seen him". When I ask Kátia how the meeting went, she tells me wistfully: "Oh, it was great! I was missing him so much. I gave him a big hug".

Divorces and marital breakdowns also tend to be passed on from generation to generation. In this study, thirteen children have divorced grandparents; of these, eleven have parents who are in the same situation or in a second marriage. According to Attias-Donfut and Segalen (1998), young people who witness disagreements and arguments between their parents or who went through a divorce in childhood are twice as likely to experience a marriage followed by a separation. And, as divorce becomes more commonplace, the separations may be multiple. Baiano, as he got to know Carol's family



better during our meetings, made the following comment: “Your whole family is separated, isn’t it?!”. Examining her genogram, we can see not only that there are a large number of break-ups, but that also the inclusion of new spouses, who, in turn, changed the composition of the family. When divorces are multiple, children are more likely to maintain relations with their grandparents by remarriage on the part of their parents or grandparents. According to data from the *Stepfamily Foundation* (2010), in the United States, 50% of marriages end in divorce and round 1,300 reconstituted families are formed every day.

**Carol’s Genogram**



### 3.4 *Indirect grandparents, borrowed grandparents, and grandparents of the heart: the grandparents by marriage*

When families are reconstituted, new members begin to play a part in the children’s lives: the parents of the step-mother or step-father and their grandparents’ new partners alike come onto the scene and change the configuration of the family. The relationship between a grandchild and social grandparents tends to be very different than that with his or her natural grandparents: while the latter are *biologically* irreplaceable, occupying a unique place in the family history of each child, grandparents by marriage form a bond that, far from being durable, depends on relationships to exist.<sup>45</sup> In such cases, the connections are not easy to establish, because the instinct that exists when a biological grandchild is born is lacking (Kornhaber & Woodward, 1985). The connection between them is elective and depends on the combination of a large number of factors to acquire any meaning.

<sup>45</sup> Even though, as we have seen throughout this chapter, relations with biological grandparents also depend on ties. This distinction between social and biological grandparents occurs because the latter have a bond that unites them and which predates the relationship itself: this is the blood, which is often sufficient to justify the children’s interest in their grandparents.



Emotional availability is an important point in these relationships. On the one hand, the social grandparents need to be able to take the unexpected grandchild into their hearts; on the other, the grandchildren have to be ready to deal with this new situation, since they may be going through a period of internal adjustment, in which they need to deal with the impact of separation, their new family situation and the arrival of a new partner in the lives of their parents before dealing with any feelings they may have for their social grandparents (Kornhaber, 1996). Lion, for example, says that he cannot accept his step-mother's parents, whom he has known for around two years, as grandparents: "I don't know. I think I need a bit more time. I don't know... I think I'm still not ready. *I'm not ready for them yet*", he says. In these relations, the age at which the divorce or remarriage of the parents occurs is an important factor, which can also be seen in the case of the remarriage of grandparents.

Gabriella, for example, has two social grandparents: her step-father's mother and her mother's step-father. Although they are both grandparents by marriage, they occupy different places in her family history. Gabriella has never had any contact with her maternal grandfather, and first met her step-grandfather by marriage when she was still very small:



Fig. 116: Gabriella's drawing of her grandparents: herself, her maternal grandmother and her step-grandfather.

"The first time I saw my grandpa, my mother's father, was a Saturday, but I hadn't seen him since I was born", she explains, having recently been reunited with him. To her mind, having a step-grandparent is "the same thing as having a real grandparent": "My mother says that he is not my grandfather by blood, that he is my grandfather by love, but it's the same thing



to me". In her drawing of her grandparents (See drawing above), we can see that she has even written "maternal grandfather" to refer to him.

Gabriella has known her step-father's mother for almost two years, like her step-father. We can see that she does not appear in her drawing of her grandparents. When Gabriella explains her reasons, she makes it clear how important time is in building up ties:

Gabriella – Well, it's like this... she [her step-father's mother] is not really part of my family. She's sort of part of my family. She's not my granny... But I think that my grandpa, mother's step-father, is my grandfather, because *I've known him since I was really little while I only met her when I was seven* [at the time of the interview, Gabriella was only eight years old].

Gabriella's map also shows the differences between biological and social ties. While, on the one hand, ties with her step-father's mother still need to be fostered for her, perhaps, one day to be able to consider her a grandmother and award her three hearts, as she has done with all the others, on the other hand, the paternal grandparents, whom Gabriella has only met when she was a baby, enjoy her full affection: "I don't know my father's father or my father's mother, because they live in Belém [3.830km from Porto Alegre], but I painted three hearts to them because *I know that they are my real grandparents*, and so I gave them three hearts, because *I love them very much*, even though I don't know them".

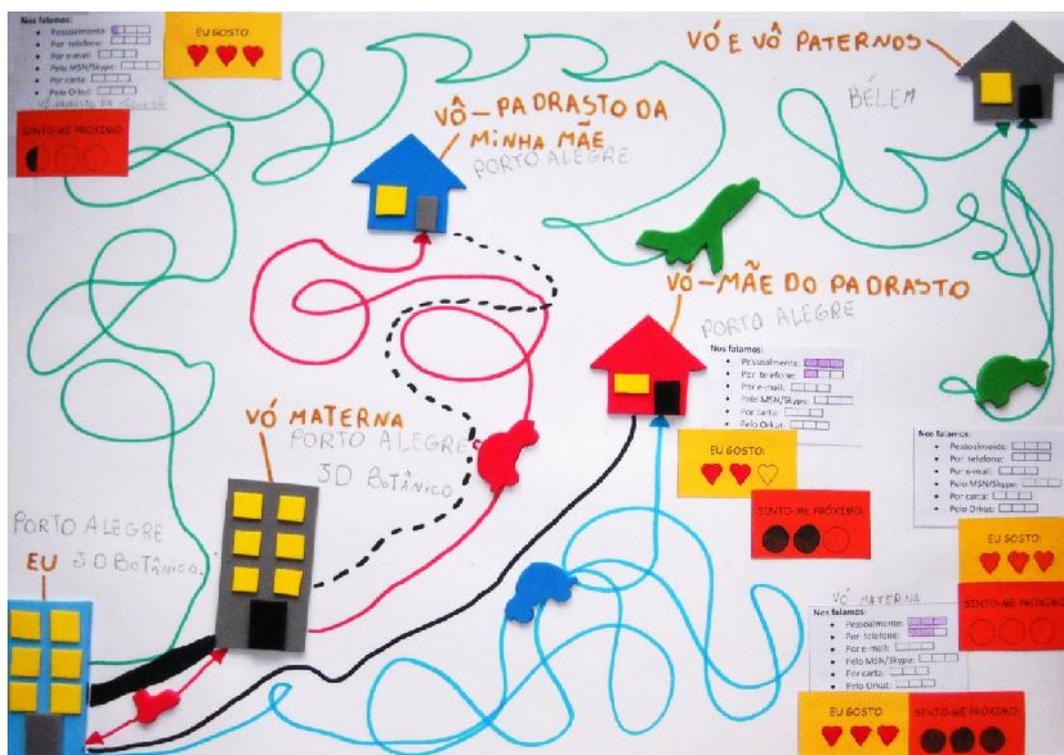


Fig. 117: Map of Gabriella's grandparents' homes.



When contact with the social grandparents is first made in very early childhood, it is easier to accept this as a “family relation”, but it also depends on the quality of the relationship that the children have with their biological grandparents (in the case of step-parents by remarriage of their grandparents) and with their step-fathers and step-mothers (in the case of step-grandparents by remarriage of their parents). Let us look closer at the first situation. In the case of Gabriella, her step-grandfather and her maternal grandmother do not live under the same roof and contact between them occurs during the weekends: “Sometimes I go to have lunch at his place, and then *my granny comes along too* or sometimes he goes to her place”. In her map (above), we can see that she walks to her maternal grandmother’s house (gray building) and from there the two of them drive by car (red route) to her step-father’s (blue house): in other words, the main link is built up by her grandmother. It is the same with Carol, who lives in her father’s reconstructed family and has paternal grandparents who are divorced and remarried.

In her drawing of her grandparents, we can see that she has chosen to draw her paternal grandmother’s husband, but not her paternal grandfather’s wife. She explains this



Fig. 118: Carol’s drawing of her grandparents. From left to right: father’s step-father, maternal grandmother, paternal grandfather, paternal grandmother and step-mother’s mother. She began the drawing with her three biological grandparents and then added her grandparents by marriage on the ends.

on the grounds of the ties of affection between them: while Carol has a lot of contact with her paternal grandmother, and hence with her step-grandfather (they live together), her



relationship with her paternal grandfather is more distant: “I didn’t draw him because *I don’t see my grandfather that much*, so I’m closer to him [her grandmother’s husband]”. There are two sides to Carol’s story: while, on the one hand, contact with her step-grandmother depends on the contact she has with her paternal grandfather, on the other, the contact she has with her paternal grandfather depends on her father. “And I only go there *when my father lets me*, because there are some weekends I can go there and some that I cannot, because I’m with my mum. My parents are separated, see”, she explains. Her grandfather almost never visits her: “Very rarely! Because his step-daughter is confined to a wheelchair and it is difficult for him to come, see”. While her bond with her grandfather continues to be strong, even though they see each other rarely – they also communicate via MSN, *email* and by telephone –, her ties with her step-grandmother depend heavily on personal contact. For this reason, she included her grandfather, but not her grandmother by marriage. The examples of these two girls also illustrate the way in which women involve men more in their family relations.

When the social grandparents derive from a remarriage on the part of the parents, relations become somewhat more complex, because they involve two consecutive social ties: the step-parents and the grandparents by marriage. When step-fathers and step-mothers – who are the non-biological members of the family with whom the children have most contact – are recognized by them as true members of the family, they may begin to think about including social grandparents in their kinship network. The process of inclusion of the latter is strongly associated with the process of inclusion of the former. Thus, before we examine relations between grandparents and non-biological grandchildren by remarriage of the parents, we should first look at relations between children and their step-parents.

Situations that involve reconstitution of a family are fairly complex and the genuine inclusion of new members depends on a variety of interlocking factors. The length of the relationship is an important variable that may pull step-fathers and step-mothers, as well as their parents, into the family. This brings together two complementary situations. The first is that time enables the children to adapt to the new family configuration, fostering the creation of ties between them. As Felipe explains, this is not necessarily an easy process:

Felipe – Sometimes it stinks; sometimes it makes you mad, because before everybody was together and you’d gotten used to that and it was cool. You’d been together for a long time and now they’re far away. You were used being together



with them and now they keep telling you that you have 'get unused to it', do you know what I mean?

While the act of "getting unused" to the presence of a parent may be something difficult and painful, "getting used" to a new person is also an experience that is charged with new emotions that it is not always easy to deal with. Amanda tells how she sees this situation:

Amanda – I don't know. Sometimes you get used to your parents living together. And when they split up and you live with your mother or your father, and they get themselves a boyfriend or a girlfriend, you get jealous, and you're angry that she separated from your father and now *there's another man living with you*, who you're not used to, because you were always used to your father's way.

If this has an impact in the initial stages, things may get better over time. Yasmin, for example, says she has changed her attitude to her step-father: "I've known my step-father for about two years. At first, I didn't like him much. I thought he was weird. Then I started to like him and now I think he's cool".

Time also enables the family to be reconstructed: bonds strengthen and the new couple may, now, rebuild their home. For the children, the stability of their parents relationship is an important step in the inclusion of their partners: when such relations are in their initial stages or not officially recognized – either by cohabitation or remarriage – they may not grant the adults the status of "step-father" or "step-mother", which reveals even greater distance between the sides of the family. For Nanda, her father's new partner, whom she has known for a little over a year, is not her step-mother "because they *are only boyfriend and girlfriend*, they aren't married yet and don't plan to get married". Lion, who has known his father's partner for more than two years and even visits her parents' house makes the same argument: "She isn't my step-mother; she's my father's girlfriend", he explains. For Lion, this will change when they legitimize their union and this may in turn change his relations with his social grandparents: "They aren't really my grandparents... maybe in 2011, when *my father and his girlfriend are going to get married in church*, so, I think yes, they could be my grandparents then".

The birth of a new family member may also strengthen these ties. For Carol, who lives with her step-mother and includes her in her family drawing (See below), because she is someone very close to her, her standing as a member of the family was sealed when her brother was born: "I think that my step-mother is part of my family because I have a little



brother who is her son. She gave me my brother and sometimes I even forget that he is part of my step-mother's family", she explains. The birth of a child not only legitimates the

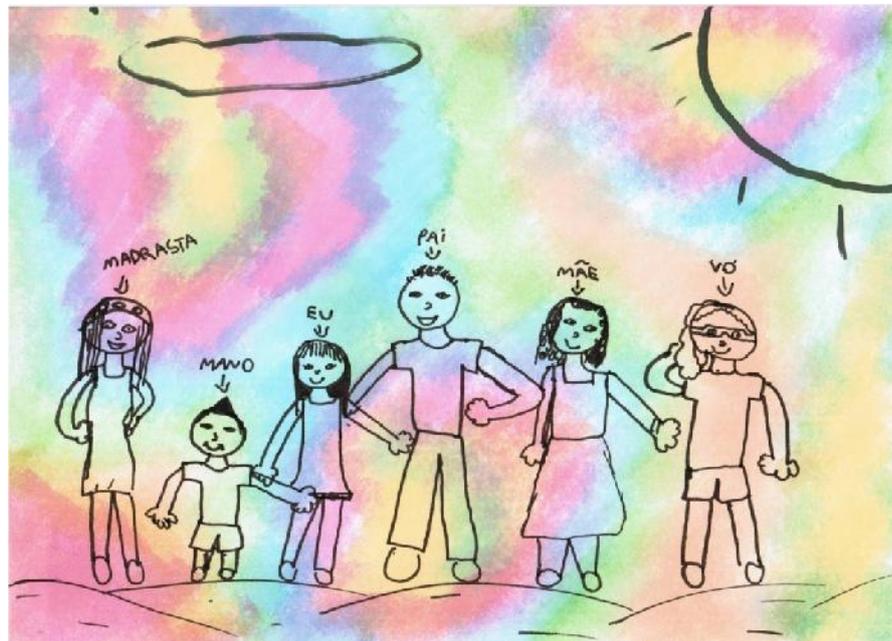


Fig. 119: Carol's drawing of her family, including her step-mother ['madrasta'].

remarriage, it also provides the social grandparents with authentic status, linking them biologically to the rest of the family. To Gabriella's mind, her step-father's parents will become real grandparents when her brother is born: "I see them quite a bit. I always go to their place with my step-father. But *they are not yet my grandparents, because my baby brother hasn't been born yet. So, they are not yet part of the family*".

When parents remarry and set up a new home, children may find themselves in one of two situations: they may live under the same roof, forming part of a truly reconstituted family, or they may have a parent who has remarried with whom they have relations but do not live with. When step-parents and step-children do not live together, the contact between them ends up being more limited and the children tend to interpret this as not being a family relation. Of the nine children who live in reconstructed families, only one does not consider his step-mother to be a member of the family, while, of the group of children who do not live with their step-parents, all four exclude their step-mothers and step-fathers from the family group. For Baiano, the determining factor is the home: "People who don't live with me aren't my family", he explains. It is the same for Fernanda, who includes only her mother and her grandmother, who actually live with her, in her family drawing, leaving



out her father and step-mother: “I only drew the people who live with me. Only those who I am closer to”, she says.

However, this does not mean that living together is the only factor at play in the decision to include or exclude people in the family. It may work in combination with other factors. A reduction in contact with the side of the family that does not have custody or a negative reaction on the part of the children to the remarriage of the parents may also influence their feelings. On the other hand, the status of step-parents may reveal itself, for its very uniqueness, as something separate from family relations. Fernanda’s choices reveal this: her father and step-mother do not form part of her family because neither of them lives with her and because Fernanda considers the contact she has with her father to be inadequate. The step-mother, apart from falling into both of these categories (not living with her and not having much contact), has also been interpreted by the girl as a casual figure, who only exists because of the choices her father has made and who has no direct impact on her own life: “I would never put my step-mother, because she’s not part of the family, because *she’s just my step-mother*, and she means *nothing to me*”.

Diego, who lives with his step-mother, also makes this distinction, providing evidence of the blurring of the boundaries between households. He draws his family as follows:



Fig. 120: Diego’s drawing of his family, showing his step-mother set apart from the other members.

himself, his father and his mother on one side of the page and, on the other, his sister by his



mother and his step-mother. Later, he decides to move his sister to the left – “she’s my real sister, because she came out of my mother” – marking the change of position with an arrow. Diego explains his drawing as follows: “I drew my family *and* my step-mother”. Diego’s words make it clear that, even though he lives with her, his step-mother does not form part of his family, representing just a person who shares the same house with him. All the other four are biologically connected.

The non-inclusion of step-fathers and step-mothers in the family represents the exclusion of grandparents by marriage from the role of grandparents. Of the five children who did not include their step-fathers and step-mothers as members of the family, none included any social grandparents. However, this does not mean that they do not know them or spend time with them, but that, in terms of family, these relations are meaningless. In such cases, the children definitely do not call them “granny” and “grandpa” and relations, where they exist, are impersonal and relatively cold. The use of the first name, the surname and other appellations such as “ma’am” or “sir” or “auntie” reflects this distinction. Gabriella, for example, calls her step-father’s mother “Auntie Gracinda” because “everybody calls her that”, but she herself realizes that when her brother is born her “auntie” will become her “grandmother”, and this name will no longer be appropriate for her new role: “I call her ‘Auntie Gracinda’. Even though *is going to be my granny*, I still call her ‘Auntie Gracinda’”, she says. It is the same with Lion, who calls his step-mother’s parents “Mrs. Rosa” and “Mr. Farias”: “They introduced themselves as ‘Mrs. Rosa’ and ‘Mr. Farias’. I don’t know what their real names are”, he says. Baiano calls his step-mother’s parents only by their first names: “I call them ‘Vera Lúcia’ and ‘João Luis’”, he explains.

If names, in themselves, reveal a certain emotional distance, this can also be seen in the quality of the relationships. When children do not have a positive or even minimally satisfactory relationship with their social grandparents, they also tend to keep them at a distance, clearly marking the boundaries that separate them. Baiano, who lives with his mother, but visits his father and his step-mother quite frequently, says that he sees her parents when he goes there: “My father lives next door to them. So, when I visit, I go there too. I see them at night, when I go to my father’s, or on the weekends, when I stay with him”. The quality of this relationship is not proportionate to the number of times he sees them: “I don’t like them. My step-mother’s father is a boring old man. He doesn’t even let



you play! It's like being in a prison!", he exclaims. Apart from this, he can clearly see the differences between his biological grandmother and his grandmother by marriage: "Oh, my really granny is different. Those aren't, are they?! [...] I feel this because she almost never gives us stuff. Only sometimes. Only occasionally does she give us some little thing". In his map, we can see that his social grandparents live so near that he can walk there, and,



Fig. 121: Detail of Baiano's map of his grandparents' homes.

although he has regular contact, this is not synonymous with affection. Baiano didn't fill in any hearts for them. For Lion, who spends time with his step-mother's parents "at the seaside, when there are parties or when [he] has lunch there", the quality of relationships is also an important factor. If he might one day find himself able to consider them grandparents – something that he says he can't guarantee –, it would be "when they *get closer, show me more affection*. Then they could be my grandparents".

Contact with social grandparents tends to be very different among children who live with their step-parents than with those who do not. Children who do not live with their step-parents are more likely to have limited contact with them and therefore also with their family. Given that a young reconstituted couple is responsible for moving the children towards this side of the family and given that contact between step-parents and step-children tend to be organized in such a way that they often spend little time with one another, if a grandparent by marriage is to play an active role in their grandchildren's lives, it is important that they live under the same roof as their step-fathers and step-mothers (Hawker et al., 2001). Of the eight children who included their step-fathers and step-mothers as true members of their family (all of whom live under the same roof), only three did not include their step-grandfathers in the drawing of their grandparents. As mentioned earlier, these relationships tend to grow stronger over time. Thus, the earlier the children experience this, the better their adaptation and inclusion in the step-parents side of the family.



Luck's story illustrates this well. This boy, who has lived with his step-father since he was a baby, says he considers six people to be his grandparents: his maternal grandparents, his paternal grandparents and his step-father's parents.

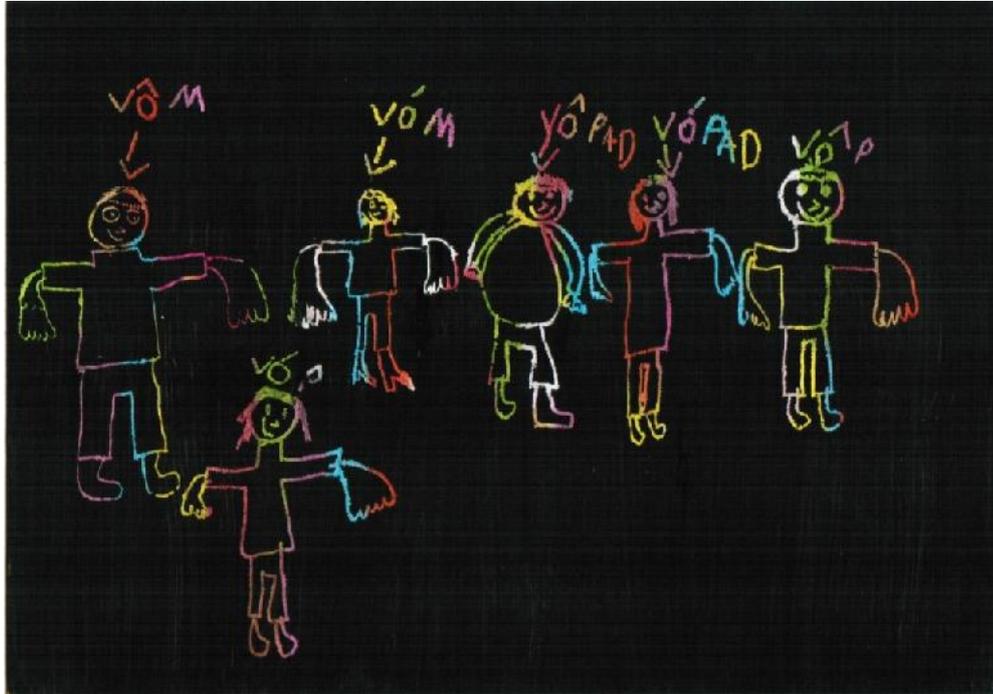


Fig. 122: Luck's drawing of his grandparents, showing his maternal and paternal grandparents and his step-father's parents.

"I met my step-father when I was two, except I don't remember it", Luck says. Since he was very small, he has spent time not only with his step-father, but also with his step-father's parents: "I can't say exactly how often I go to their place, but I think I go two or three times a month. I go for birthdays and sometimes *I go there just to see them*", he explains. Contact with his step-father's parents also occurs at parties and during the holidays: "Sometimes we go to the beach together for Christmas, but not every year". They visit him more "for birthdays and other parties". We can see that Luck began his drawing with his maternal grandparents, with whom he lives, moving on to his step-father's parents, and finally his paternal grandparents, who live in another city. In his map, he shows the routes between his paternal grandparents' and his step-father's parents' homes. Although Luck visits the city where his paternal grandparents live two or three times a month (Garibaldi, 127km from Porto Alegre), he does not have very regular contact with them, which means that Luck feels much closer to his step-father's parents than to his own father's:



Luck – My paternal grandparents never come here; neither does my father. The only time that my father came to Porto Alegre, so far as I know, was when I was little. He came on the bus to pick me up from the bus station. But my grandparents never came with him, just my father.

The contact Luck has with his father is mediated by his mother’s family: “My granny and grandpa take me to their place. They have a farm in Garibaldi, and my father picks me up there”. His father, in turn, encourages contact between Luck and his paternal grandparents: “After he picks me up, he sometimes drops in at my grandparents’ place before I go to Bento [the city where his father lives, 11km from Garibaldi], or, sometimes, he drives straight there”. His contact with his paternal grandparents, which is restricted to face-to-face communication, is not very significant and he does not therefore appear to have much intimacy with them:

Luck – I drew them quite close because sometimes I go there. My father picks me up. Sometimes we drive straight to his place. When he goes there *we sort of just pass by* and then go to my father’s house. So I don’t go there much and when I do, *I don’t talk with them much*.



Fig. 123: Luck’s map of his grandparents’ homes.

The bond with the social grandparents is established by the mother and the step-father, with whom Luck has a relationship: “I go there when my parents want to go, I mean,



my step-father and my mother. Yesterday, for example, was his father’s birthday and we went there”. In his family drawing, we can see that Luck also includes his step-father (who he drew before drawing his own father): “My step-father practically lives with my mother and *I talk with him a lot; I talk with him more than I do with my father*”.

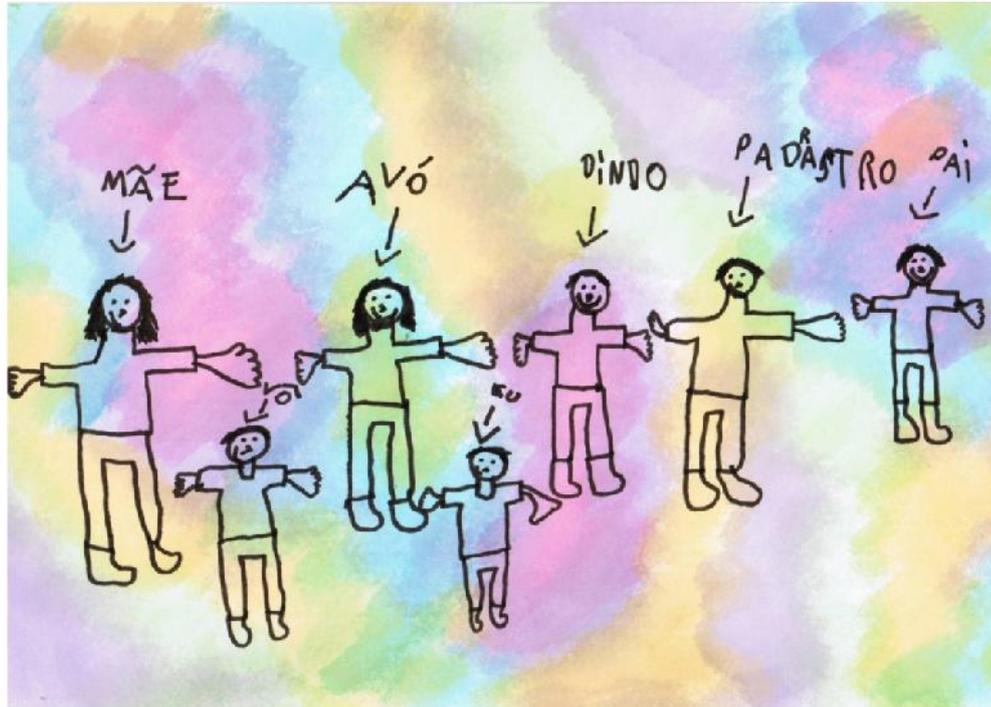


Fig. 124: Luck’s drawing of his family, including his step-father [‘padrasto’].

Daniele, whose parents have joint custody and who divides her time between her mother’s single-parent family and her father’s reconstituted family, also considers her step-mother’s parents to be grandparents. His parents separated when she was still young and her father remarried shortly afterwards: “I’ve known my step-mother for a long time, because, when I was three, my parents separated, and by the time I was four she was already here. I was still a baby. I don’t remember very well, but she says that I’ve known her since I was three or four years old”, she says. In her family drawing (below), we can see that she has drawn, on the left, her mother’s family and, on the right, her step-mother’s family, in which she includes her paternal grandmother and her grandmother by marriage (her grandfathers are already deceased). Daniele places herself in the center of the page, with a line going down the middle, and between two arrows pointing in opposite directions. This suggests that she belongs to both the families represented. In fact, she sees a lot of both: “I spend one Saturday and Sunday with mum, and the next with my dad. On Mondays,



Tuesdays and Wednesdays I am also with my dad. And on Thursdays and Fridays with my mum”, explains Daniele, who seems to have a very clear calendar for seeing both sides of the family.

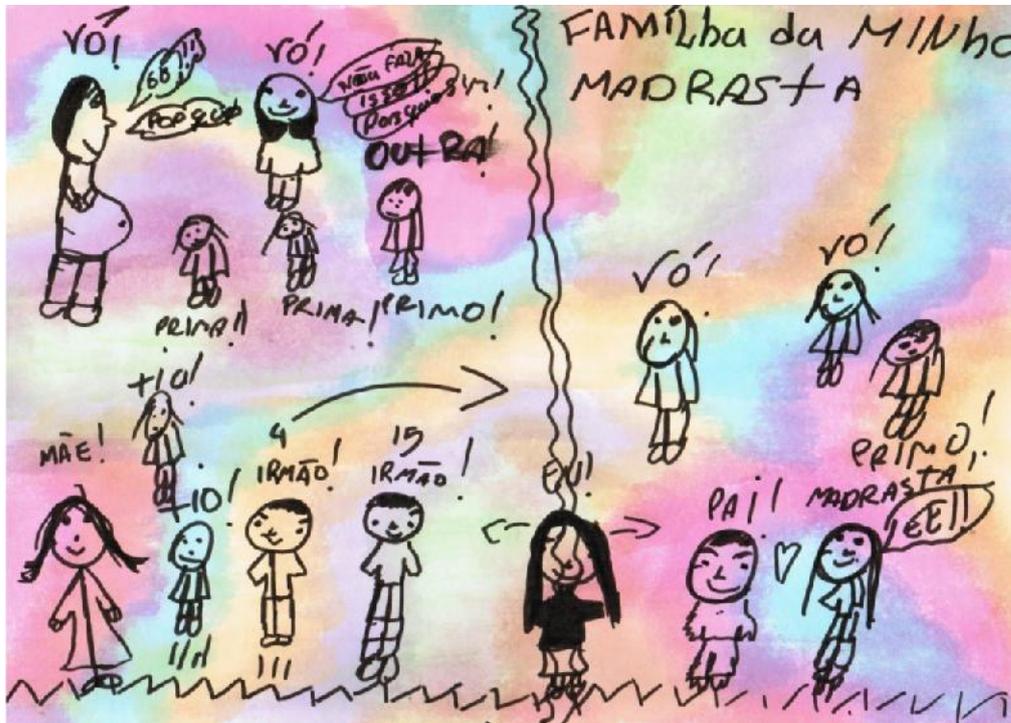


Fig. 125: Daniele's drawing of her family: her mother's family and her step-father's family.

Daniele has also drawn a heart between her father and her step-mother, indicating that there is an emotional tie between them and that she, as a child, accepts this relationship as familiar. According to Kornhaber (1996), one of the factors that influences the quality of the relationship between grandparents and social grandchildren is the extent to which the children are satisfied with their parent's remarriage. When the children can see that the father or the mother is happy with his or her new partner and that the latter also has a satisfactory relationship with them, there is a strong possibility that these new members will be included in the family. In Daniele's drawing, we can see the central role the women play in these relations: on one side is the mother's family (her name appears not to have been written due to lack of space) and, on the other, her step-mother's family, of which her father forms part. Daniele also has a four-year-old brother by her father's second marriage.

In her map (See below), we can see how Daniele moves about among her three sets of grandparents: she still has most contact with her maternal grandparents (mediated by her



mother), but she also frequently sees her paternal grandmother (mediated by her father) and, to a slightly lesser extent, her grandmother by marriage (mediated by her step-mother), whom she visits mainly at Christmas and New Year, owing to the geographical distance that separates them (Lagoa Vermelha, 262km from Porto Alegre): “We go there for Christmas, but, sometimes, when *my step-mother* is missing her mother, *I go with her*”, she explains.

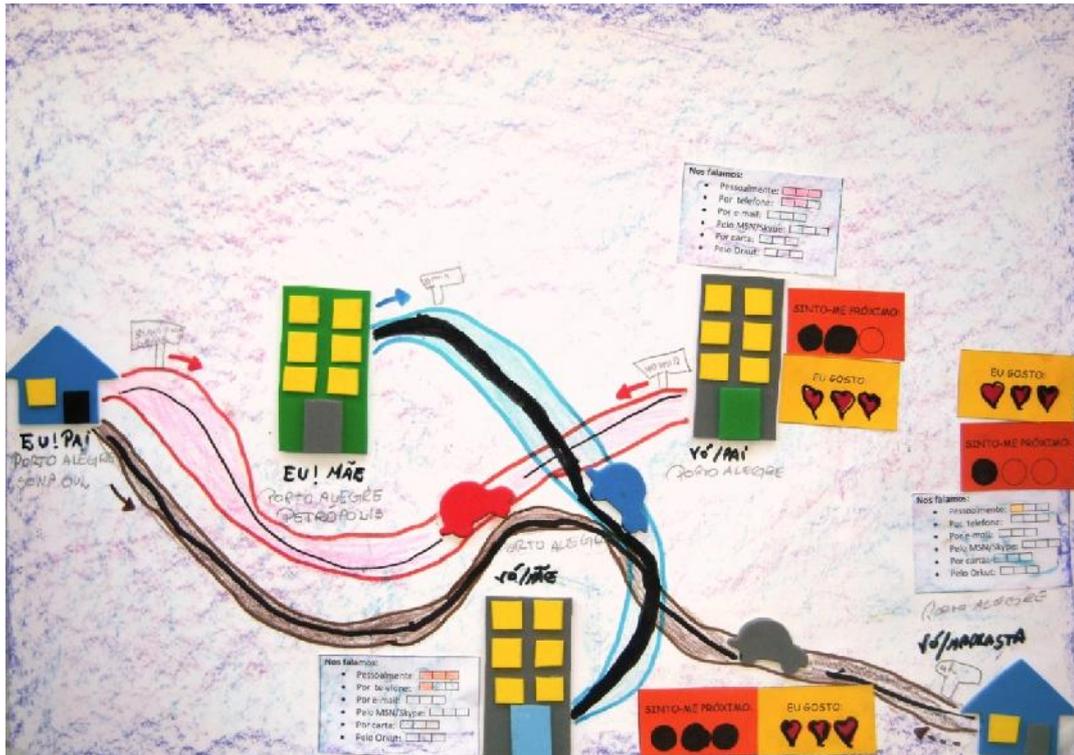


Fig. 126: Daniele’s map of her grandparents’ houses.

One interesting fact about Daniele’s intergenerational contact is that she grants all three grandmothers three hearts, placing biological grandmothers and grandmothers by marriage on “an equal footing”. When I ask Daniele if she likes them all the same way, she quickly responds: “I really like them. *It makes no difference to me*; they’re all my grandparents”. We can see that her step-mother’s mother has, because of the amount of time she has known her, been granted the status of grandmother. “I’ve call her ‘Granny Teres’a since I was little. They started to call her Granny Teresa and I picked it up”, she explains. Talking about her social grandmother, she exclaims: “*Oh, she’s so good to me. Sometimes, we sleep over at her house in Lagoa Vermelha. It’s great! I like her a lot!*”.

Lucas, who lives with his father, step-mother and seven-month-old brother by his father’s second marriage, also recognizes his step-mother’s parents as his grandparents.



Although he has been living with his step-mother for only two years, he seems to be quite involved in his reconstituted family, especially since ties with his mother's side of the family are strained and have been being gradually lost, since his mother died when he was only five years old. In his map, we can see that there is a lot of contact with his paternal grandmother, whom he meets on "all special days and some Sundays, when [his] father wants to have a barbecue at her place", a fair degree of contact with his maternal grandmother, during "some weekends, when he feels like going there" and slightly less contact with his grandparents on his step-mother's side, principally during the summer holidays, as they live in Rosário do Sul, 387km from Porto Alegre:

Lucas – I can't. If it were in the winter holidays, last year I would have gone. But, it wasn't worth it, because we'd have to come back too soon and only stay a week [...] and we can't go at the weekends either, because Saturday and Sunday is too short a time when you have to spend a whole day traveling.



Fig. 127: Lucas's map of his grandparents' homes.

However, although he sees relatively little of them, they are constantly in touch by telephone: "They ring me every morning. Almost every morning! They talk to Lúcia [his step-mother], wanting to know how we are, about my brother, what he's learnt to do, what's going on". The arrival of a biological grandchild may also have strengthened this relationship, since it tends to unite generational lines more. Lucas can see, from his own experience as a



grandchild and from the birth of his brother, that the way the social grandparents treat him is very similar to the way they treat his brother (who is their biological grandson) or to the way his paternal grandmother – whom he is very fond of – treats him. Thus Lucas fills in three hearts for these grandparents:

*Lucas – I can see that that they treat me as if I were their grandson. They feel the same towards me, even though I'm not part of their family. That's why I like both of them [the social grandparents and his paternal grandmother] the same way. Because they treat me the same, they express themselves in the same way.*

Lucas, since he feels welcomed by his step-mother's parents accords them the status of grandparents (See drawing below) and, when he thinks of the family troubles on his mother's side, he blurts out: "I'd prefer that this one here [his maternal grandmother, the last one he drew] were from another family".



Fig. 128: Lucas's drawing of his grandparents: his grandparents by marriage, his paternal grandmother and his maternal grandmother.

Lucas's words show how much his social grandparents are involved in forging ties with a grandson who, as he himself says, is not their flesh and blood and thus supposedly not part of their family. This is not an easy process, since the "blood tie" (Hawker et al., 2001) may prevent them from treating social and natural grandchildren equally. There may even be differences among natural grandchildren, arising from shared interests, geographical proximity or sheer preference. In the writing task, in which the children had to choose one of their grandparents to write about, Lucas chose his step-mother's father – the



first he had drawn –, saying that he is a “*great grandfather*”, who “takes him horse-riding”, who “teaches him about camping” and who he feels “happy” with when they have fun together. “*My grandfather and I are really close*”, he writes. Lucas grants his step-mother’s parents the status of grandparents: “I call them ‘Grandpa Neri’ and ‘Granny Loiva’”.

What we learn from Lucas, Daniele, and Luck’s experiences is that a good relationship with step-fathers and step-mothers who live under the same roof, in association with contact with the social grandparents seem to facilitate acceptance of the latter in this role, especially when the children are already accustomed to their parents being divorced and have known their partners for a considerable period of time. And, as with the biological grandparents, it is the middle generation, this time based on the step-parents, who play a fundamental role in fostering this contact. Finding a balance between the father’s, mother’s and step-parent’s side of the family is no simple matter. The involvement of social grandparents in the lives of their grandchildren tends to be less, since childcare responsibilities rarely fall to them. Of all the reconstituted families, only Carol receives help from her social grandmother, which may be because she lives nearby and because of the birth of her biological grandson: “She comes round during the week to look after me and Junior in the afternoon”, she explains. When the children spend time with their step-parents, but not with their step-grandparents, it is very difficult to form a substantial bond.

Yasmin and André, who live in reconstituted families, do not have contact with their step-parents’ parents. André only knows his step-father’s mother, having met her once, while Yasmin doesn’t know them at all. Despite both living with their step-fathers and recognizing them as members of the family, like Luck, Lucas and Daniele, they do not recognize their step-grandparents as grandparents: “I didn’t draw them because they are not my granny and grandpa! I have met one of them, but I can’t even remember the name!”, André explains, somewhat dumbfounded by my question. Yasmin is also surprised when I ask her why her step-grandparents are not shown: “Why? They aren’t my grandparents! I don’t even know who they are!”, she explains. In their drawings (See below), we can see that, while, on the one hand, their step-parents are shown in the family drawing – André’s criterion being “the people who live with me and my cousin” (he calls his step-father ‘uncle’) and Yasmin’s “those I can remember better and like the most” –, on the other hand, their

step-grandparents do not appear in the grandparents drawing.<sup>46</sup> As Attias-Donfut and Segalen (1998) put it, for elective bonds to be activated, they must be fostered on a regular basis.



Fig. 129: Yasmin's drawing of his family, showing her step-father ['padrasto', on the right side].



Fig. 130: Yasmin's drawing of his grandparents, showing her paternal and maternal grandparents. Her step-grandparents are not included.



Fig. 131: André's drawing of his family, showing his step-father ('uncle') ['tio'].



Fig. 132: André's drawing of his grandparents, showing his paternal and maternal grandparents and a great aunt. His step-grandparents are not included.

When step-grandfathers and step-grandmothers are themselves divorced and the children spend time with both sides of the family, they may choose to have relations that are more satisfactory, as they had with their biological grandparents. Carol, for example, considers her step-mother's mother to be her grandmother, but not her step-mother's father: "I don't have much to do with him. I see her more", she explains. While Carol sees her step-mother's mother "some weekends, during the week when [I have] lunch there or

<sup>46</sup> It is clear that lack of contact with step-grandparents is only one factor that may have led Yasmin and André not to consider their step-parents' parents as grandparents. However, this would appear to be a determining factor in itself, since these children have no biological or emotional ties on which to base their choices.



when she comes to take care of me and my little brother in the afternoon”, her step-mother’s father only sees her “at Christmas sometimes, when they drop in there, or at Easter; but he never comes”. In her map, we can see that, while the route to her step-grandmother’s house goes two ways, that to her step-grandfather’s is one-way, and she has no other contact with him that is not face-to-face. Because her relationship with her step-mother’s mother is more harmonious, she gives her three hearts and includes her in the grandparents drawing: “Neusa, yes, because I like her more. And because I’m closer to her!”.

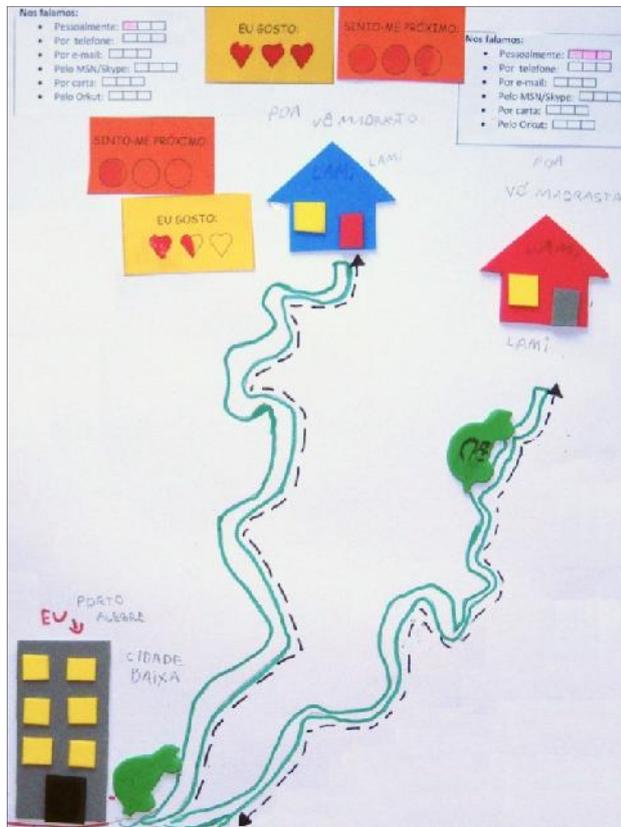


Fig. 133: Detail of map of Carol’s grandparents’ homes.

However, social grandparents do not arise only as a result of the remarriage of parents or grandparents. Children may also, of their own accord, forge links with older people whom they call grandparents. This is the case for Yasmin, who calls her godfather’s mother ‘grandmother’ – “she’s my adopted grandmother” (it is interesting that in this case it is a child adopting an adult) – and for Luca, who spends so much time with an elderly couple who live next door that he has adopted them as his grandparents:

Luca – I met them when I moved to this apartment near to school. I was in the first grade. They are my neighbors, so I called in them, and started spending time with them, and we became close and, before I knew it, I was calling them ‘granny’ and ‘grandpa’. [...] I called them granny and grandpa, because they are elderly.

As Luca knows that they are not blood relatives, he calls them “borrowed grandparents”; we can imagine that they, somehow, make up for the physical absence of his biological grandparents, who live in Cruz Alta, 350km from Porto Alegre. In the case of the grandfather, he occupies a very special place in this boy’s world as he has never met either of his biological grandfathers. He even appears in his family drawing (See below), in which he portrays himself, his mother and father, who live with him, and his maternal grandmother,



whom he is very fond of. For Luca, the reason for including his “borrowed grandfather” in the family is clear: “He’s my only grandpa, the only one I have!”. According to Kornhaber and Woodward (1985), when grandparents do not exist, children may even invent them, venturing outside the family circle and choosing an older person to occupy the vacant position.



Fig. 134: Luca’s drawing of his grandparents, including his ‘borrowed’ grandparents.

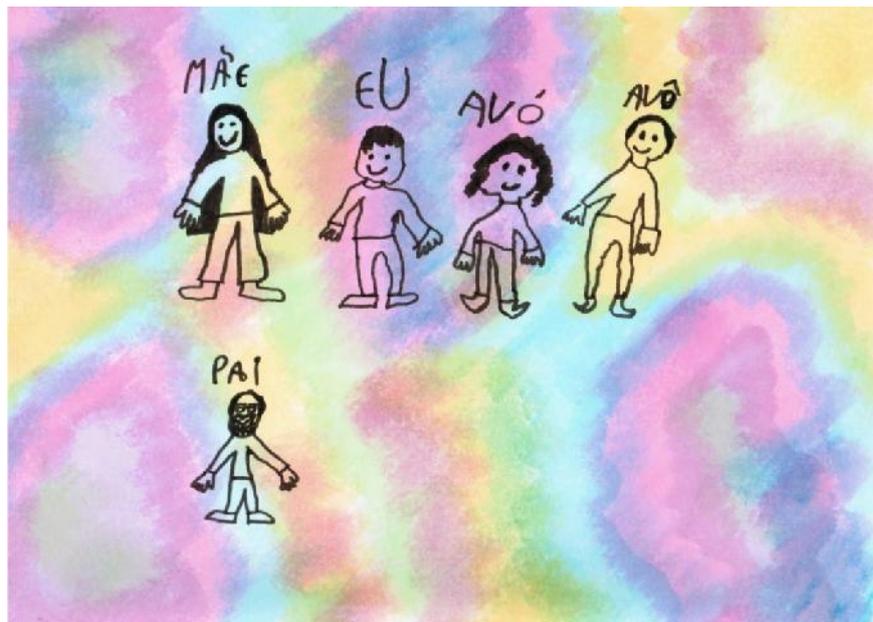


Fig. 135: Luca’s drawing of his family, including his ‘borrowed’ grandfather.



In Luca's map (below), we can see how nearby they live and how often they meet: "I see them a lot. How can I put it? I just have to knock on the door and I'm there. [...] We see each other when we're going out or when they're going out. Sometimes I see them through

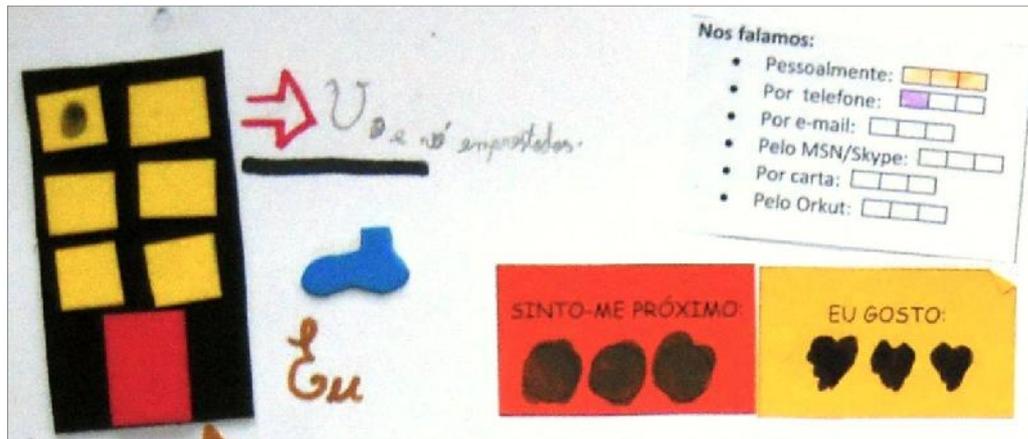


Fig. 136: Luca's borrowed grandparents' house (detail from the map of his grandparents' homes).

the peep-hole", he explains. It is the same for Fernando\*, who has "'grandparents of the heart', who live the apartment above and always help him with his homework". In his written task, he also mentions geographical proximity as a factor determining the companionship and friendship between them: "My non-biological grandmother is more of a companion, because she is my neighbor, my friend".

Maternal grandparents, paternal grandparents, step-father's parents, step-mother's parents, 'borrowed' grandparents, adopted grandparents, grandparents of the heart. There is no small list of the grandparents that the children may have contact with. The different meanings these relationships have for them depends, as we have seen, on a large number of factors. When relations are multiple, they tend to be more complex. Felipe's family history illustrates this well. His parents split up when he was five. Since the age of six, he has been living with his mother and his step-father. His paternal grandparents divorced and remarried. His grandfather lives in Florianópolis (Santa Catarina), his grandmother in Quintão (Rio Grande do Sul). His maternal grandparents are divorced and his grandfather has remarried. His grandmother lives in Natal (Rio Grande do Norte) and his grandfather in Tapes (Rio Grande do Sul). Felipe knows his step-father's mother but does not have much contact with her because she lives in Rio de Janeiro (Rio de Janeiro). Felipe recognizes all of these as grandparents, be they biological grandparents, or "indirect grandparents", as he





as widowhood, separation, loss of mobility, advanced age or poor pension plans; on the other, it may result from a request for help on the part of the middle generation, in the face of unemployment, the high cost of living, financial difficulties, teenage pregnancy, divorce, and childcare needs, ask for family support.

Grandparents and grandchildren may live together in two different ways: with or without the presence of at least one parent. Such situations normally involve reasons and circumstances that are quite distinct. In the first case, the grandparents are responsible for full-time care of their grandchildren, becoming parents for a second time. This family configuration tends to occur when parents are unwilling or unable to look after their children, and delegate the task to the older generation. According to Pebley and Rudkin (1999), exclusive care by grandparents occurs mainly in cases where the parents are divorced, become pregnant early in life, are in jail, are involved in drugs and alcohol consumption, or have a chronic disease. In countries where there is a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, for example, it is the grandparents who take care both of their infected children and their grandchildren. Research carried out by the WHO (2000) has shown that, in Zimbabwe, around 72% of those who care for people infected with the virus are aged over 60. Of this with HIV/AIDS, 40% were children and 28.2% grandchildren of the head of the household. 80.5% of orphans were being cared for by grandparents (Camarano, Kanso, Mello & Pasinato, 2004a).

In North America, where the kind of household with grandparents that is growing fastest are those where neither parent is present, grandparents have played a decisive role in childcare. According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, only between 1990 and 1997, the number of families with grandparents, children and grandchildren living together had already grown by 13%, while, for families comprising only grandparents and grandchildren, the figure was 39% (Casper & Bryson, 1998).<sup>47</sup> Owing to the large number of grandparents who are primary caregivers, various terms have been invented to refer to them. In North American sociology, we find “*Grandparents as Parents*” (GAP), “*Grandparents as surrogate parents*”, “*Grandparents as second Parent*” (GASP), “*Grandparents Offering Love and Devotion*” (GOLD), “*Grandparents as caregivers*” or even, “*Grandfamily*” (Edwards, 2003).

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<sup>47</sup> I use this data from 1998 because it comes from a special survey of families living with grandparents in the United States. Although it is not up-to-date, it shows the increase in cases over a certain period. More recent data were presented in the first paragraph of this section.



When grandparents take on the role of primary caregiver, they must adopt a more authoritarian and disciplinarian approach to their grandchildren, which means that they lose the “traditional role” of the grandparent. According to the study conducted by Landry-Meyer and Newman (2004), with 47 North American grandparents who live with their grandchildren without the middle generation, most of them reported a certain inner conflict, because they feel deprived of the experience of spending time freely and naturally with their grandchildren as a grandparent because of the daily responsibilities of parenthood. These relations are also marked by difficulties with living with the grandchildren, who do not respect the position occupied by the grandparents, especially when they do not have legal custody. Some grandparents also doubt their parenting abilities, as they think they are too old to become parents, believing that they no longer have the energy they used to or because they fear that they will make the same mistakes they judge themselves to have made when bringing up their own children.

Some studies show that grandparents who care for grandchildren alone also experience more physical and mental health problems, limited finances, poor mobility and limited social contact, which they have to give up to deal with the daily needs of children and adolescents (Lumpkin, 2008; Lever & Wilson, 2005; Williamson, 2003). As Edwards (2003) points out, this role is normally thrust upon the grandparents in an abrupt fashion, and many, at least to begin with, are reluctant to take on full-time responsibility for their grandchildren. However, there are also some positive aspects. Research carried out with grandparents who are caregivers shows that many feel their “new” role to be rewarding, and have greater self-esteem, and feel reassured to know that their grandchildren are better off with them than they would be with their parents. The kindness and affection they receive from their grandchildren may also be a source of much joy (Goodman & Rao, 2007).

However, grandparents and grandchildren may also live together along with the parents. In fact, most households in which grandparents and grandchildren live under the same roof are composed of three generations. In the United States, for example, these make up 78% of the total number of homes in which grandparents and grandchildren co-reside (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The fact that three generations live together may signify a prolongation of *cohabitation*, with children procreating without ever having left their parents’ house; or a process of *re-cohabitation*, which occurs when parents and children go



back to living under the same roof (Pebley & Rudkin, 1999; Peixoto, 2004). In the group of children who live with their grandparents covered by the present study, all live in three-generation households: six have lived with their parents and their grandparents since they were born and three went through a process of re-cohabitation. For the former, the main reason appears to be early pregnancy: five of the mothers bore children between the ages of 16 and 24, and have never left their parents' house.

Fernando – *My mother has always lived there, my grandmother too. I was born, my sister was born and we all live there together.*

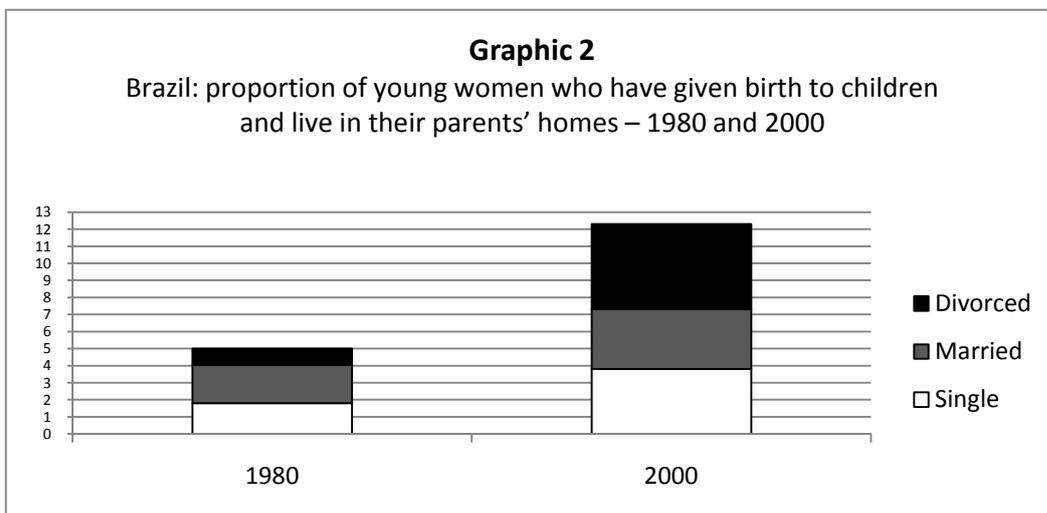
Fernanda – *My mother has lived with my grandmother since she was little and always in the same house. We've lived in that house for ages! I've lived there since I was little, since I was born!*

Jaqueline – *We've always lived together, my grandmother had my mother, my mother grew up there and I'm growing up there.*

Luck – *My mother was born in Garibaldi, but then they [his mother's family] went to live in another building. And they moved here in 1999 and I was born in 2000. And here I am today.*

Ashley – *I have always lived with my grandparents, since I was really little... I think that my mother has never lived anywhere else!*

According to Camarano, Mello, Kanso and Andrade (2006), there has been a rise in the percentage of young women who bear children and continue to live in their parents' home. This percentage has risen both for single mothers and for those who are married or separated, being especially high in the last of these groups, as can be seen in the chart below:



Source: IBGE Data. Produced by the IPEA (In: Camarano et. al, 2006).



According to these authors, this “increase is the result of changes in marriage among the Brazilian population, which is no longer the preserve of those who are considered adults, and is now entered into by younger people too” (Camarano et al., 2006, p. 218). This, in combination with the large number of divorces, means that there has been, among households where generations live together and an elderly person is the head of the family or spouse, a drop in the proportion of families made up of a couple with children and a rise in those where mothers with children live together (Camarano, 2006). This was also a significant finding of the present study. Of the nine children interviewed, only three lived with both parents in their grandparents’ house. Another significant feature of cohabitation is the strong presence of women, which can be seen both in the second and the third generation. While, on the one hand, custody of children is normally awarded to the woman, who, where she is a single mother seeks the help of her own parents, grandmothers live longer than grandfathers and seek support from the family when they are widowed. Thus, many children may experience a form of cohabitation that is strongly centered on women: of the six children who live with only one parent and grandparents, only one lives with the father. Of all nine, seven live with their grandmother alone (without the grandfather), normally the maternal grandmother.

Of the children who have been through a process of re-cohabitation, the main reasons seem to have been divorce of the parents – which, as shown throughout this chapter, mobilizes family support – and the difficulty of finding housing of one’s own, which leads many families to share the same residence or the same plot of land. This is the case for Alice, who went to live on the same plot that her maternal grandmother’s house occupies when her parents



Fig. 138: Drawing of Alice’s houses and her maternal grandmother.

decided to acquire property of their own. Her grandmother owned a plot of land with two



houses and lived in the one at the back (See drawing): “First, we lived in a gated community [‘condomínio’]. Then, when we went to Fortaleza, as my father stayed here in Porto Alegre, he renovated the house [‘casa’] in front that my grandmother used to live in [‘casa da vó’]. Then, when we came back from Fortaleza, we went to live there”, the girl explains. Although they have two separate houses, Alice says that she lives with her grandmother: “To my mind, I live with my granny, because my granny lives on the same plot as me, so I see her every day. All I have to do is walk across a small garden and I’m there”<sup>48</sup>. Leonardo, who, since he was born, has lived on the top floor of his maternal grandmother’s property, also received her help with building his own home<sup>49</sup>.

Leonardo – My granny bought the land and asked them to build a house, a kennel and a garage. Not really a kennel. Then, my mum went to live with my granny and my dad too. And they build the part on top together and the kennel. I’ve lived there since I was little, since I was born. I was born and went there.

While, on the one hand, the multi-generational residences may be changed outwardly, with the construction of extensions and upper floors, on the other hand, they may also be altered internally, especially when different generations have to share the same household. José, who went to live with his father and his paternal grandmother some years after his parents split up, tells how



Fig. 139: Photo of José’s room in his paternal grandfather’s house.

they restructured the house to receive him: “I have my own room. It used to be a room full of junk that no-one used. So they tidied it up and made it into my bedroom” (Fig. 139). The

<sup>48</sup> The assumption that they live with their grandparents, even when they do not actually share the same house has a different meaning for different children. While Alice says she lives with her grandparents, for example, Lion and Catarina, who live in the same building as their maternal grandparents [as next door neighbors], see this as being “neighbors”, even though they see each other every day.

<sup>49</sup> Help with acquiring one’s own home (ceding a plot of land, one floor of a tower block or donating property) does not necessarily, however, mean that the family income is divided between parents and children. In the cases of Alice and Leonardo, for example, the parents say that they receive no further financial assistance in building and maintaining their home.



same occurred with Natasha (Fig. 140), who moved to her grandmother's house with her mother when she was three.

Natasha – Before we arrived, my granny was in my room and her bedroom was the living room. But they changed everything when I arrived with my mother. When we arrived, she moved to here, found a place to put her bed and gave her room to us.

In her photograph, we can see the room that used to be her grandmother's transformed into a room for her daughter and granddaughter: "This is my room. I share it with my mother. We sleep in the same bed", Natasha explains<sup>50</sup>. Alice, who lived for a number of months in her grandmother's house before she went to live in the house her father renovated,



Fig. 140: Photo of Natasha's room in her maternal grandmother's house.

tells how her family adjusted to the new living arrangements: "My grandmother's house has two rooms. Before we traveled, we [father, mother, her and her sister] *lived all squashed together in one of them* and my grandmother lived in the other. It wasn't very easy", she explains.

In cases of cohabitation, it is normally the owner of the property who hosts the other members of the family, ceding part of the house to them or allowing the construction of an extension. Data from the IBGE show that the greatest proportion of people who live in their own homes is found among the elderly (Camarano, Kanso & Mello, 2004), which means that it is they who usually play host to their children and grandchildren. According to Peixoto and Luz (2007), cohabitation has been a common practice not only among the working classes

<sup>50</sup> Natasha's situation shows how many middle-class families need to rearrange their living spaces to get through hard times. According to Natasha, she and her mother went to live with her maternal grandmother when her parents had just got divorced and her mother was unemployed. Her grandmother's house was refurbished to receive two new residents and the pair of them had to sleep in the same room. Nowadays, the mother and the grandmother contribute to the family budget--most of which comes from the grandmother's pension – but they receive no financial assistance from Natasha's father. In the next chapter, we shall see that, in cases of cohabitation, mothers and daughters may come to share the same bedroom.



but also among middle-income families. According to these authors, the older generations were able to reap the benefits of a period of economic growth and government housing programs (such as the National Housing Bank) which helped them to finance the purchase of a home of their own, since interest was index-linked to wage increases. When these programs came to an end and high interest private loans became the norm, young middle class people began to find it difficult to acquire property, while for the working classes it became more difficult still.

The introduction of the *My House, My Life Program*, in 2009, has begun to lighten the burden in this regard, since the Federal Government is again making it easier for families with an income of up to ten minimum salaries to finance the purchase of their own home, with the goal of building a million houses in all. However, apart from the question of housing, young people are beset by other problems, such as longer years of schooling, high levels of unemployment in this age group and subsequent difficulty of finding a job. According to the International Labor Organization (2011), even though, in recent years, Brazil has seen a slight drop in unemployment, it is estimated that 3.5 million young people aged between 16 and 24 are still unemployed. This represents around 45% of the national workforce. In these cases, cohabitation is of vital importance as it allows one generation to help the next.

As we have seen, cohabitation in this study seems to have been brought about mainly by the needs of the second generation, and this is in accordance with macro-social data. In Brazil, among families that include elderly people (26% of Brazilian households), 86% are headed by an elderly person, which means that they are largely responsible for the family budget, contributing around 70% of the household income: 73.8% when headed by a man and 66.4% when headed by a woman (Camarano, 2006). In a study carried out by the Perseu Abramo Foundation/SESC (2007) of elderly people in Brazil, this fact was also noted. It found that seven out of every ten elderly people are heads of households and that two thirds of the country's 5,561 municipalities have an economy that is largely sustained by the elderly. This indicates that a change has occurred in the "traditional role" of the elderly, who have gone from being *dependents* to being *providers* of a good part of the family budget<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> Some families that do not live with the grandparents also say that they receive financial assistance from the older generation, which demonstrates the importance of the grandparents' network of support in maintaining the standard of living of the Brazilian middle-class.



Cohabitation helps single parents and lifts them out of poverty, allowing children and grandchildren to stay in school longer and reducing the exposure of children to child labor. Although the greater number of co-habiting individuals does not increase the family income, demographic studies have shown that Brazilian families that include elderly people seem to be better-off economically than others: “Families that do not include elderly people are twice as likely to live in poverty than those which do”, according to Camarano et al. (2004, p.59). In terms of income, the elderly population is better off than their younger counterparts – only doing worse than those aged between 40 and 59. It is therefore the elderly who provide the greater part of economic assistance to their families. And, although the benefits of social security represent an important portion the family income, Peixoto (2004) points out that many elderly people need to continue working, even after retirement, as a way of maintaining their living standards and networks of family support.

Relations between grandparents and grandchildren who cohabit also tend to be stronger: the children are not only physically, but emotionally closer to their grandparents, feeling they are being well received and cared for by them. Living together fosters intimacy and strengthens the ties between generations, as Jaqueline shows:

Jaqueline – I like both my grandmothers, but I like this one here [the one she lives with] a little bit more, because I know how much she does for me. She does loads of things for me, loads of favors,.. and I don't know my paternal granny so well; *this one I know much better.*

Ashley also says that she likes the grandmother she lives with more: “I like her more because I'm always with her more. *I know about her life, she knows about mine* and because we see each other more!” the girl exclaims. Intimacy also produces ties of affection in a relationship in which grandparents and grandchildren not only spend time together, but are often friends and confidants: “I like my maternal grandparents more because I spend more time with them *and there's lots of things I talk just to my grandmother about*”, Luck says. Leonardo, filling in hearts for his grandparents in the “I like” section of the map-drawing activity, quickly fills in three for the grandmother he lives with and exclaims: “I have no doubt about this one! *She's a great friend* and helps me with everything!”. As we can see in the details from their maps below, the children tend to like and feel closer to the grandparents they live with. Some even think that three hearts is not enough to express all the affection they feel for them, and increase the number.

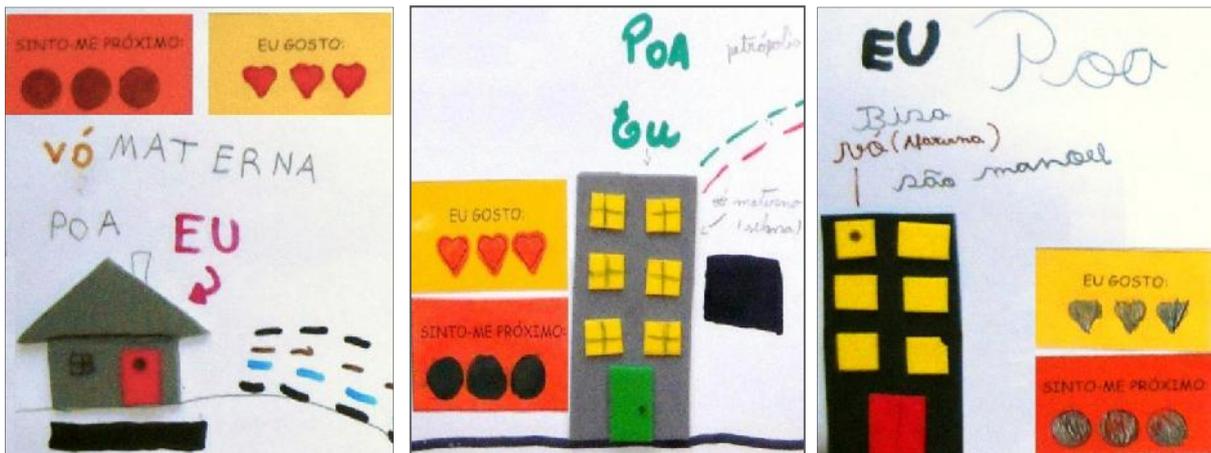


Fig. 141: Details of the maps drawn by Marcelo, Fernando and Leonardo.

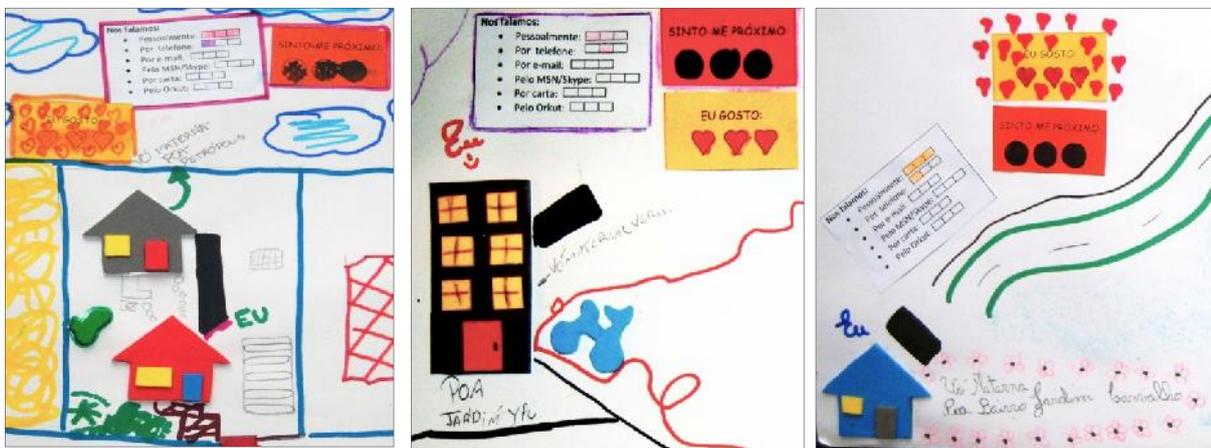


Fig. 142: Details of maps produced by Alice, Fernanda and Jaqueline.

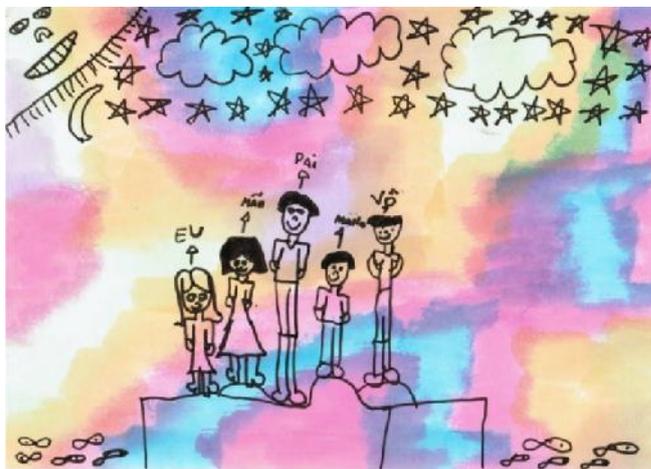
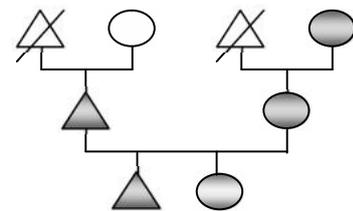
For these children, the grandparents who live with them are not only their elders but form part of their tight-knit family. In the drawings reproduced below, we can see that all of them include the grandparents they live within the family drawing, while they do not in the case of those who live elsewhere, i.e. those who do not live with them. This is connected mainly with the boundaries of the home, which define, at least in part, “who belongs” and “who does not belong” to the family: “I drew these people because *they live with me* and I am closer to them. They are the ones that are *closer to me*”, says Jaqueline, who drew her maternal grandmother, but not her paternal grandmother. For Nycolle, the people who are part of her family are those that live with her: “They are the ones *I see every day*. Sometimes we see them in passing. They also have lunch and dinner with us...”. Thus, her maternal grandmother, who recently split up from her grandfather, is not included in her drawing. Nor is her paternal grandmother, who lives in another city. Leonardo, who drew his maternal



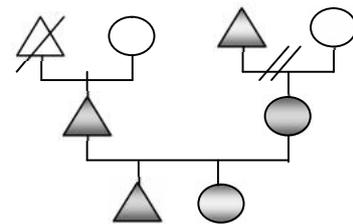
grandmother, but not his other two grandparents, says he drew her “because she’s the only one that lives with him and his family... I’m not so close to the other two”, he explains.



**Genogram of family members who live with Jaqueline**



**Genogram of family members who live with Nycolle**



**Genogram of family members who live with Leonardo**

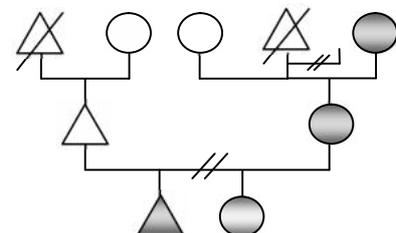


Fig. 143: From top to bottom, drawings of their families by Jaqueline, Nycolle and Leonardo, showing grandparents who live with them.

As we have seen throughout this chapter, children who do not live with their grandparents tend not to include them in the drawing of their family, confining themselves



to the nuclear family of father, mother and children. Under these circumstances, grandparents only appear when they attempt to draw their extended family, including uncles and aunts and cousins, for example, or when they choose the people who they feel intimate and emotionally closer to. In the latter case, the grandparents appear more than other members of the family, showing them to be, after the parents, the figures who have most contact with and provided the strongest point of reference for the children. However, this does not mean that they include all the grandparents in the family drawing. The children choose the ones that are more important to them and those they are fondest of.

Kátia, for example, who lives in a nuclear family and drew her parents, her siblings, her paternal grandmother (but not her grandfather) and her maternal grandparents, says that she included them “because they are the people she speaks to most, who she spends most time with, who she calls now and again, who she visits most and the ones who visit her most”. Amanda, who lives in a single-parent family, drew her father, her mother and her maternal grandparents “because they are the people I have more contact with and who I see more” (See drawing below). Melissa included her paternal but not her maternal



Fig. 144: Amanda's drawing of her family, which includes her maternal grandparents, even though she does not live with them, because, along with her parents, they are the most important family members.

grandparents in her drawing of her family (See drawing below), because they play a unique role in her everyday life: “My grandpa and my granny look after me; they are very important to me”. For João, “the grandparents are more part of my family than other people; [...] they



are more part of the family than uncles and aunts, because they are closer to us and look after us more often”.



Fig. 145: Melissa's drawing of her family, which includes her paternal, but not her maternal grandparents, because they are always looking after her.

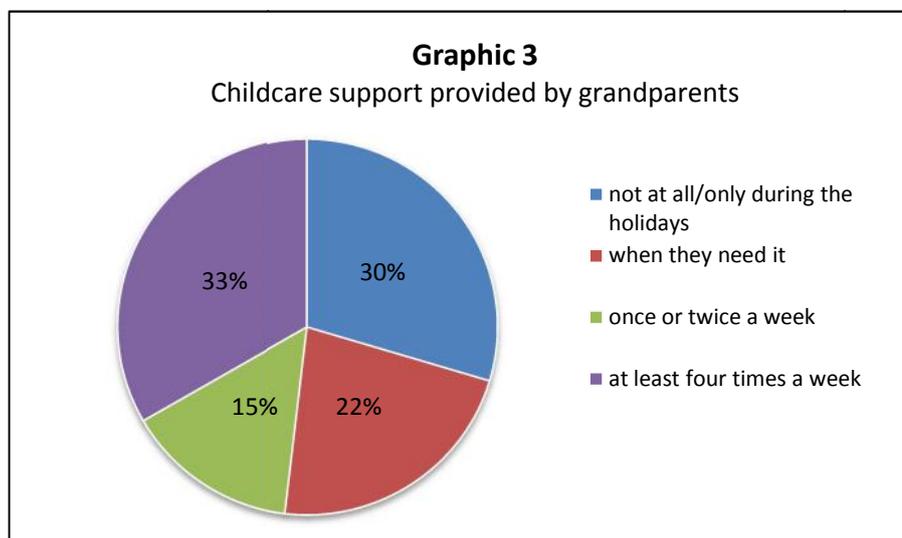
### 3.6 *Between caring and raising: the importance of grandparents' support*

The involvement of grandparents in the care of grandchildren is, as João points out, quite a common phenomenon and does not only occur in situations where the grandparents live under the same roof. According to Hank and Buber (2009), childcare being carried out by relatives is a fairly normal alternative, with the grandparents – in particular the grandmothers – being the preferred family members to fulfill this function. They are normally at the end of their professional career – if not already retired – and help out their children as a continuation of their parental duty, providing trustworthy services for their children free of charge: “only a blood relative is good enough to care for a blood relative”, Attias-Donfut and Segalen (1998, p.183) remark. Data from the *Elderly in Brazil* research project, carried out by Fundação Perseu Abramo in partnership with SESC Nacional and SESC/SP, show that 50% of the women interviewed regularly cared for their grandchildren and 20% reported that they were the principle caregivers (Alves, 2007).

The chart below shows that, of the children included in the present study, practically half (excluding cases where grandparents live under the same roof) are cared for by at least



one of their grandparents on a weekly basis (48%). Of the 30% (eight individuals) who are not cared for by any of their grandparents or who receive this support only during the holidays, in the case of five, the grandparents who live nearest are at least 100km away, which may also explain the lack of care, since geographical proximity is a determining factor in these situations. Breaking down these data by family group, it can be seen that the children from nuclear families are predominantly those who receive care “when they need it” or “not at all/only during the holidays”, while the children from one-parent and reconstituted families receive such care on a weekly basis. However, there are differences between these two groups. Daily care (at least four times a week) is more common among children from single-parent families. Of the nine children (33%) who are cared for at least four times a week by their grandparents, five are from this group. The children from reconstituted families are divided between those who are cared for “at least four times a week”, “once or twice a week” or “not at all/only during the holidays”, since they receive care from the parent and step-parent as part of the network of support and some have parents who live far away.



Data from the SHARE survey (2006) – *Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe* – also show the importance of grandparents in the network of support. According to this survey, 1/3 people aged 65 years or over help their children to care for their grandchildren, devoting an average of 4.6 hours a day to this activity. As Attias-Donfut (2002) point out, the family is not broken: there is solidarity, based on the exchange of



goods and services, which suggest that there is a balance between individualism and interdependence. The childcare support provided by grandparents is also a way of meeting the needs of the family, creating alternatives to scant or inadequate state services. Especially among women, the assistance provided for the young mother helps her to pursue her career and is evidence of women's solidarity with one another in their attempts to be economically active. Thus,

[...] the fact that the young mother has to go out to work appears to be a more decisive factor in explaining the existence of care on the part of the grandparents than the fact that the grandmother does not work. Whether she is available or not, she organizes herself so as to find time for helping her daughter (or daughter-in-law) with her duties as a mother. [...] These forms of behavior are evolving towards greater gender equality. They are signs that changes are under way in the way daughters are brought up and they reveal that there is a new solidarity between mother and daughter in the struggle for women to assert themselves outside the family home (Attias-Donfut & Segalen, 2001b, p.21-22).

As Lewis (2007) points out, only in the United States and some Nordic countries is public policy regarding children drawn up on the assumption that both men and women work full time.

However, family solidarity in childcare does not occur only in countries in which the role of the state is weak and where many duties are considered to be the responsibility of the family. Comparative European studies show that the networks of family support are fairly active in countries where there are generous social services, casting doubt on the idea that social provisions are a cause of the breakdown of the family. Hank and Buber (2009), in their analysis of the SHARE survey data, found lower levels of care in Spain, Italy, and Switzerland, countries in which the *welfare state* is based on the extension of family obligations, than in countries known for powerful state intervention, such as Sweden, France, Denmark, and the Netherlands. While, in the first group, 50% of grandmothers and 40% of grandfathers provide such care, in the second, 65% of grandmothers and 60% of grandfathers report doing so. However, the pattern is the reverse when the criterion under investigation is the regularity of care: Italy, Spain and Greece lead the ranking for regular care (around once a week), while Austria, Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands are in the middle and Sweden, Denmark and France have a low-to-medium level of regular care. This means that the likelihood of providing some kind of childcare is higher among



grandparents from the last group and lower in the Mediterranean countries, while the propensity to care for children frequently is higher in the first group and lower in the last.

A number of factors may explain this difference. On the one hand, the levels of participation of women in the labor market are lower in southern Europe than in the north: while it is below 50% in Mediterranean countries,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Scandinavian women have a paid job. In Scandinavia, as in France, public childcare benefits create a structure of opportunities that encourages mothers to work, but where many grandparents occasional complement institutional care. In Mediterranean countries, the lack of public care services for children stops women from working, which means that only a limited number of grandparents need to get involved in childcare, since the mothers are full-time caregivers. However, when the mothers work, they depend on the full-time support of grandparents, which increases the level of regular care provided by this generation (Hank & Buber, 2009). On the other hand, single-parent families are more common in the Nordic countries than in southern countries, which leads to greater need for the family support network (Attias-Donfut, Ogg & Wolff, 2006), as we have seen throughout this chapter. In view of this, in countries where the *welfare state* tends to “relieve families of their obligations” (Keck & Saraceno, 2009), there is no breakdown in the family, but “a true synergy between private and public assistance” (Attias-Donfut, 2002, p. 114). In countries, in which the state is less present, such as Brazil, the family has to provide care and other needs for its members.

“Because grandparents look after us more” (João), “because the grandmother is a person who looks after the grandchildren whenever the mother can’t” (Lion), “because the grandmother is a person who is almost a mother to her grandchildren” (Baiano) and because the time that children spend in the care of their grandparents is sometimes greater than the time they spend with their own parents, the boundaries between these two homes may become blurred. Melissa, who lives with her mother, but spends the whole day at her paternal grandparents’ house, in the morning, during lunchtime and after school, is an example of this. When she is asked who she lives with, she promptly replies: “I live with my mother!”. However, when asked why she excluded her maternal grandparents but included her paternal grandparents in her drawing of her family – image reproduced earlier –, she says: “Because I *don’t live with* my maternal grandmother, so I *don’t feel so close to her*”. The fact that she “does her homework and everything, and only then goes to her mother’s



house”, means that she feels she lives in two separate residences: “To my mind, I live with my mother, but my granny and my grandpa, I... but I... I think I live with both of them! With everyone!” she concludes. In the detail of her map reproduced below, we can also see that she has written “me” on both buildings, to indicate that she lives in both.

Melissa – My mum doesn’t like people thinking that I live with my grandmother, because *I practically do live with my grandmother* and she gets mad when I say that.

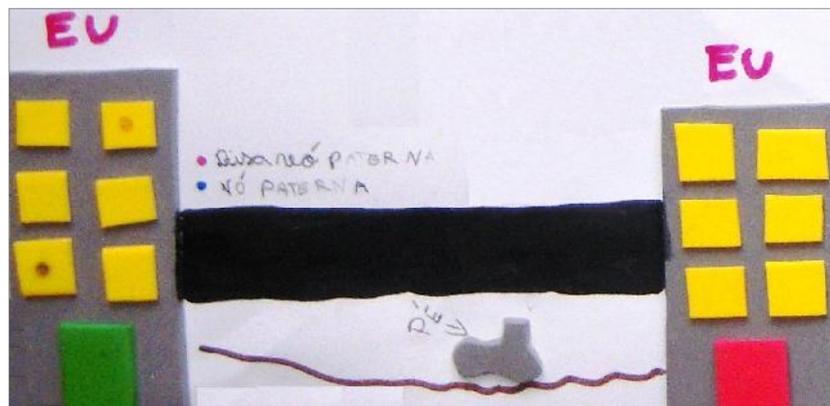


Fig. 146: Detail of Melissa’s map. On the right, her grandmother’s house; on the left her mother’s.

When grandparents and grandchildren are very close because of childcare, it is not only the boundaries between residences that become blurred: the very idea of parenthood may break down and grandparents need to learn to keep the “right distance” (Attias-Donfut & Segalen, 1998), taking care to be neither too close to nor too distant from their children and grandchildren. According to Dolto (1998a), in cases of need, young parents entrust their children to the grandparents, but they are also worried about them “becoming intrusive and spoiling the children. [...] So, parents call on the grandparents to be present when they need them, but also, not to be present when they are not needed” (p.173). These boundaries need to be treated carefully, especially when they concern the children’s upbringing, since the children expect the parents to support their authority in this function and respect the rules they have laid down. Thus Carol says that “[her] mother doesn’t let [her] granny hit [her]”: “she says that only she can hit me, only her, but she’s never hit me”. Alexandra also believes that the childrearing relationship that the grandparents had with their own children should be different from the relationship they now have with their grandchildren, since the authority of the parents comes between them:



Alexandra – Do you know what I teach my grandmother? I teach her how to look after a grand-daughter, because she only knows how to look after a daughter... She doesn't know how to look after a grand-daughter, so I teach her... *because, with her daughter she can do what she wants, but with a grand-daughter it's not like that...* with her daughter, if she does something wrong, she can hit her, but with a grandchild, she has to be a bit more patient, because, if she isn't, mum will be furious!

According to Segalen (2001b), the main differences between parents and grandparents reside in the way the grandchildren being brought up by their children and daughters-in-law. When the grandparents take care of their grandchildren, these relations can become more strained, because they may feel uncomfortable about having to care for their grandchildren and not being able “to express their ideas and genuinely have a say in decision-making and the children’s upbringing” (Lins de Barros, 1987, p.69). Family conflicts are always close to the surface, and children may therefore witness these stormy relations between their parents and grandparents, as depicted by Alexandra, whose grandmother looks after her after school:

Alexandra – There’s this disagreement about things at home which becomes an argument and gradually builds into a big fight! [...] And I did these drawings [skull, broom, snake, spider and pumpkin] to show that they are talking, but I don’t want to say what they are saying, you see? To say that it is something bad...



Fig. 147: Alexandra’s drawing. “A Sad Memory”: her mother and grandmother arguing.

According to Dolto (1998a), “it is good for children to understand that their grandparents think differently from their parents, because this will lead them to feel that they have the right to think differently from their parents, which is an important stage in their development” (p.176). On the other hand, Dolto (1998a) goes on, “it is bad for children to feel that their grandparents are judging, condemning and undermining the decisions of their parents and that their parents, in turn, are setting themselves up as

rivals, taking offense” (p.176). Let us see what Alexandra has to say:

Alexandra – And when they fight, my grandpa takes sides with my grandma rather than my mother. My mother and my grandmother had a fight, not long ago, last



week it was, and my grandpa said to me: *'Your granny would never argue with your mother, and so on, it must be your mum who argued with granny, and so on'*. And they take out what they have against mum on me, and mum takes out what she has against grandma on me. *And it makes me sad.*

For most of the children, when they are in the care of their grandparents, the latter have the authority to tell them when they are doing "something wrong":

Betina – I think that they have the authority, because they are older and also because they are my mum and dad's mother and father.

Gabriella – I think that anyone in my family can teach me.

José – Anyone in the family can help me.

Melissa – They are our grandparents, they are teaching us.

Alice – My granny fights with me, she fights with me because she loves me, she puts me straight.

Fernando – If our parents let our grandparents look after us, they have control of us, don't they?!

Generally speaking, however, when children are looked after by grandparents, whether it be those who live with them or those who only look after them, relations are fairly untroubled. Practically none of the children report highly stressful situations and the grandparents appear to occupy a more secondary – albeit no less important – role in their upbringing. For Alice, who lives with her grandmother, the main caregivers are the parents: "Our grandparents are our *second parents*. *When our parents aren't there*, they are responsible for us". It is the same with Fernanda, who lives with her mother and her grandmother: "Our first mother is our real mother and *our second mother* is our grandmother". As Pebley and Rudkin (1999) put it, "living with grandparents in a three-generation household does not necessarily imply that grandparents are heavily involved in taking care of grandchildren" (p.220). The study carried out by Goodman (2007) with 376 North-American grandparents who live with their children and grandchildren also shows that, in most cases, the parents have primary responsibility for their children, with the grandparents playing a secondary, and therefore less conflicting role than that found in families where the middle generation is absent.

However, it is clear that a lesser degree of involvement on the part of the grandparents does not stop them from taking disciplinary attitudes with regard to their grandchildren. When the parents are not around, this role is often left to them: "when I am



with my granny it's my granny who's in charge; when I am with my mum, it's my mum", André explains. In such situations, the grandparents may need to discipline their grandchildren and relations may become more strained: "I like my granny a little more than more or less because when I'm there [he spends every morning with his maternal grandparents] she doesn't let me play *Playstation* until late, she doesn't buy me figurines and won't give me anything I want" (André). Marcelo, who lives with his grandparents, says he doesn't like it much "when they argue about [him] doing things". But there are important differences regarding the manner in which parents and grandparents reprimand the children: "the difference from parents is that *grandparents just go on at us*" (Lucas), "our parents beat us, but grandparents can't do that: so, when I mess around, she doesn't even shout at me!" (Felipe). "My granny *just talks to me* when I do something wrong" (Luck), "When I play up, *we just talk about it*" (Luca).

Fernando, who lives with his maternal grandmother, says he has never argued with his grandmother: "I only do that with my mum", he explains. "I have never argued or fought with my grandparents" (João). "Never! If I argued with them I'd be in deep trouble! My mother would punish me for arguing with grandma!" (Alexandre). Generally speaking, when the grandparents need to "take the reins", the discipline tends to take the form more of advice, which does not necessarily develop into intergenerational conflict.

Lion [who is looked after by his grandmother after school] – My granny only fights with me about bath-time. I prefer to do my homework first and then take a shower: the homework is for tomorrow, the shower isn't for tomorrow!

José [who lives with his paternal grandmother] – Sometimes, I run about the house, because the dog is trying to bite me and jump up on me and, when I am running, my granny always says, "Careful José, don't run in the house, you could hurt yourself!"

Jaqueline [who lives with her maternal grandmother] – My granny says, '*When I die, you'll miss me.*' And stuff like that... So, I stop and think and stop bothering her.

Fernanda [who lives with her maternal grandmother] – One day, I wanted to stay out on the street and my granny was ordering me back into the house. But I wanted to stay out on the street. Everyone was there! So, I said to my granny, '*No granny, I want to stay out here!*'. And she said, '*Go on then, stay out there on the other side of the street, waiting for your mother, because I'm going to take a nap...*' So, I ended up thinking better of it and going indoors.

Alexandre [about times when he visits his grandmother] – My grandmother never gets mad at me. Only when I mess with my brother, but she very rarely gets mad at me. *My mother will get mad at me, my father, anyone will get mad at me before she does!*



João [about times when he visits his grandmother] – My granny never fights with me! It's very rare! My Granny Helena just says, '*Oh, don't do that!*', in a gentle voice... She never shouts at me. And my Granny Vera says, '*Don't do that, my dear, don't do that...*'

In the family stories told by the children, the grandparents may even appear to be invested with the authority of adults who are looking after their grandchildren and teaching them to “be polite” (João), “to respect their elders” (Alice), “not to fight with cousins” (Lucas) and “not to shout at old people” (Nanda). However, as they appear to assume, even when they live with their grandchildren, a more secondary role in *moral education*, everything seems to suggest that they have managed to distance themselves – at least partially – from the educational role of parents. This does not mean that the grandparents are not involved in childcare – they drop their grandchildren off and pick them up from school, stay with them after school, prepare meals for them, do housework and help them with their homework –, but there usually seems to be a space left for them to play the unique role of grandparents in their grandchildren's lives, and make the most of the more enjoyable side of this relationship. “It is these differences between their past life as parents and their present life as grandparents that allow them to establish a kind of relationship with their grandchildren that allows them, through the grandchildren, to recover not only the life they have lived, but also the life that they were not able to live” (Lins de Barros, 1987, p. 103) when parental obligations often did not allow them to enjoy their relationship with their children to the full. “Grandparents treat their grandchildren better than they treated their own children, because my grandpa said that he was very strict with my father, but he's very sweet to me!”, Carol says.

Alice [who lives with her grandmother] – Our grandparents are always helping us with things, it doesn't matter what. *If we do something wrong, they don't tell on us to our mums.*

Fernanda [who lives with her grandmother] – Sometimes, when my mum isn't there, I play up and *my granny doesn't even shout at me*, she just tells me to clear everything up. *She gives me moral support!* When my mum goes out, I sometimes mess things up and *my granny even helps me to clean up!*

Ashley [who lives with her grandparents] – Once, I put on a sheet in the living room to play at being a ghost, and I scared my grandmother and she was angry. But she helped me to clear up *and didn't say anything to my mother.*

It is normal for childcare to occur in the grandparents' home. It is the grandchildren who normally go there and explore their houses. They find different furniture and objects



and experience new tastes and smells. They want to explore everything inside and outside the house. The house is a meeting place: and it is there, among the photographs and clothes and appliances from another age, that many generations come together and the children can learn about their material heritage. As the grandparents' house plays an important part in this relationship, in the next chapter, the children will tell us what these spaces mean to them.

*“I shall never forget my grandmother and the big house where she lived... A house is the multiplicity of sensations that it communicates to us: coziness, protection, the kindness the things that live there show us, a wily cat stretching on the verandah, the magic of piano music coming from the drawing room, the smell of cake coming from the kitchen, the weaving flight of a blue butterfly tracing a spiral among the azaleas in the garden, the sunny morning light on Sundays coming through the blinds and, more than anything, the delightful feeling of sharing dreams, joys, and sometimes sorrows. I cannot think of my granny and her house as being distinct entities: they form a single and unforgettable whole, which projects a velvety light over my childhood memories.”*

(LOPES, Artur. *My Grandmother's House and other Exotic Places*. 2006)

## Chapter 4

### *The Grandparents' House*



*Das Grundstück ist seine Welt* (Fonte: Wenzel-Orf, 2000).

When we cross this threshold, we enter a private space. The home is a place of intimacy, that holds the memories of the person who resides there. The interior tells a story, which is written on the walls, in the cupboards, in the drawers, in the garden: “your plot of land is your world” – *Das Grundstück ist seine Welt* – wrote Wenzel-Orf (2000, p.21) on the life the centenarian who appears in the photograph above. The home is strongly linked to the biography of its tenant, who modifies and adapts it, transforming *space* into *place*. “My garden has 660 m<sup>2</sup>... I grow potatoes, cucumbers, beans, and tomatoes. I do everything alone: digging, weeding – everything. *This place is unique!*... I planted everything myself, 40 or 50 years ago... Now I am old, I have my forest at home!” (Wenzel-Orf, 2000, p.19), the old man says about his ancient dwelling. According to Bachelard (2008), “images of the house are twofold: they are in us as much as we are in them.” (p.20). What begins with an undifferentiated space becomes a place as soon as we appropriate it, endowing it with



meaning and value (Tuan, 2003). “When humans invest meaning in a portion of space and then become attached to it in some way, it becomes a place”, as Cresswell (2004, p.10) puts it.

The home, which was previously someone else’s, or empty or under construction, becomes “my home”, a named territory that is someone’s possession. The individual acquires an address, a place to settle down and live privately. “The home is our corner of the world. It is, as it is often said, our first universe. It is a veritable cosmos.” (Bachelard, 2008, p.24). And it is between these four walls that many stories unfold and that grandparents and grandchildren can live this relationship to the full. The provision of care, holidays and family reunions normally take place in the home of the oldest members of the family; and thus “in the minds of adults, the grandparents’ house is always a place rich in memories.” (Attias-Donfut & Segalen, 2001). A place which, because it is fixed in our memories “as it appeared to us [when children], shocks us when we see how it appears to have shrunk to our adult eyes.” (Bosi, 1994, p.435).

But the grandparents’ house is not only a part of their children’s childhood; it is also – often – part of the childhood of their own parents; and it may also bring into the present the times in which different generations, now lost in time, were together there. Houses occupied not only by its occupants, but also by “their taste, touch, sounds and words, rules and use of space, light and color, smells, furniture, appliances, and the rhythms of life.” (Horn & Barbosa, 2001, p.73). Houses whose furniture “bears the essence of those who frequented them or frequent them.” (Segalen, 1999, p.234). And, to arrive there, the grandchildren, often need to travel a long way...

#### 4.1 *On the route: from the grandchildren’s house to the grandparent’s house*

The route that joins the grandchildren’s house to that of their grandparents is not always a short or quick one. While, sometimes, the children can “walk” (Gabiella) or “cycle” (Marcelo), “not needing to use the car much” (Catarina), sometimes the distances involved require the use of more means of transport. The children expressed on paper their perception of a journey that is “really short” (Érica) or one that “takes a long time” (Carol) using co-ordinates (the distance between objects) and notions of perspective (near/far) that they gave meaning on the basis of their own experience and the ways they perceive time



and space. The journey to their grandparent's house is long when "it takes time and we start to get bored" (Lion), "there's nothing for us to do in the car" (Gabriella), "we can't do anything but sit there waiting" (Luca), "It makes me sick" (Érica), "I have to take sweets" (Natasha) and "it makes me throw up" (Catarina).

Children also understand the distance between their house and that of their grandparents by asking the people who are traveling with them: "I ask my grandpa, if it's going to take long to get there" (José), "I ask what time it is and more or less how long it's going to take to get there, and that's how I know it's going to take a long time" (Gabriella), "I ask my grandpa, who is driving, or I keep asking 'Are we nearly there? Will we be getting there soon?'" (Yasmin), "I ask my parents and, if they say it is going to take a while, I know that we have a long way to go and I can sleep" (Alice). Sleeping on the journey is an important point of reference for some children: "I know it takes a long time to get to my grandparents' house because *I sleep in the car* and, if it's not, I stay looking out of the window", Alexandra says. When they sleep, "time passes quicker" (Alexandre): "when I go to my grandmothers and I sleep, so I don't feel the distance", Luca explains, "but when we can't sleep, we have to sit for hours and hours. And we still haven't arrived!" (João).

The journey itself also tells us something about the distance involved. "When I go to São Luiz [where his paternal grandparents live, 523km from Porto Alegre], I can see how far it is" (Maria); "I can see lots of houses and trees going by. When I don't see many houses and trees, I know that it is a short journey, if not I know that it is long", Pedro explains. "I read the signposts... 10km to São Paulo!" [the State where his paternal grandparents live] So, I know that we're almost there!" (Yasmin). Signposts, hours and kilometers are important ways of measuring distance and many children make use of these to describe the journey that takes them to their grandparents' house: "I even know exactly how many kilometers it is to my grandparents' house! 65!", Adriana exclaims; "To visit my grandmother in Uruguay, it's 865km! I know because my father told me", Alex remarks. "It takes six

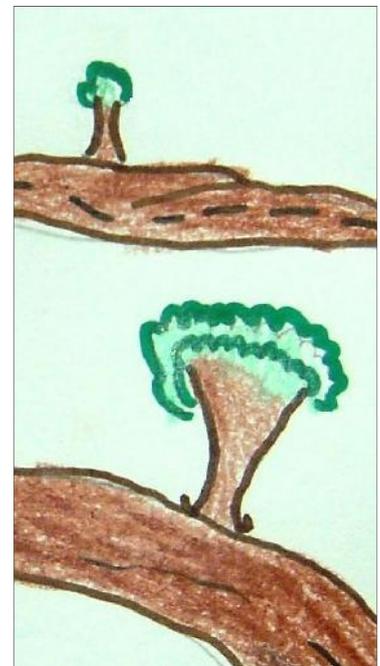


Fig. 148: Detail of Pedro's map: the trees that become smaller (because more distant) along the way.



hours for us to get to my grandparents' house, it's a really long way!" Betina explains.

Apart from this, the very dynamics of the journey may indicate the distance traveled. Luca knows that his family always plans the journey to Cruz Alta (350km from Porto Alegre) to visit his grandmothers and that they need to follow a routine: "My father leaves in the early hours of the morning to avoid the traffic. We are on the road at the crack of dawn". Alex feels the length of the journey from the number of times they stop: "When we drive to Montevideo [where his paternal grandmother lives], we don't go straight there. That's another reason I know it's a long way. From here to there, it's a 12-hour journey, I think. But we can't do it in one go. So we spend the night in a hotel".

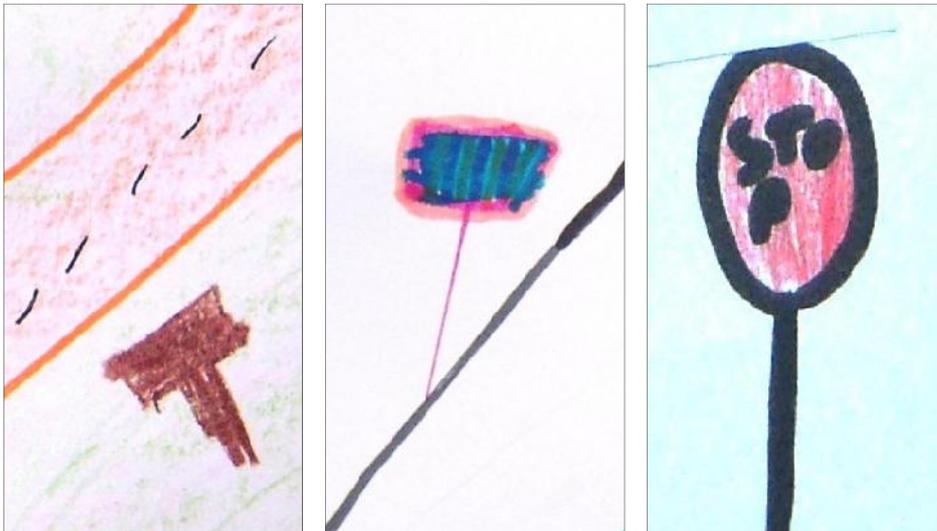


Fig. 149: From left to right. Detail of Yasmin, Melissa and Lucas's maps: signposts.

The chart below shows the geographical distance between the children's homes and those of the grandparents who do not live with them.<sup>52</sup> As we can see, a large number of grandparents live in the same city as their grandchildren (40 of the 68 residences included), which means that most of them (25 out of 40) meet, on average, at least once a week with their grandchildren. However, the number of grandparents who live in other cities is not insignificant (28 out of 68 residences) and contact with these usually occurs during the holidays:

<sup>52</sup> The y axis represents the number of grandparents' residences and not the number of grandparents. The x axis represents the where the grandparents live in relation to the grandchildren interviewed.



As mentioned throughout the third chapter, geographical distance primarily affects the regularity of face-to-face contact. However, even though they visit their grandparents' house only during the holidays, this does not mean that the children have a weaker relationship with them. Although, in these situations, the physical meeting may occur only once or twice a year, many children will spend more than a month in their grandparents' houses on these occasions: "I go to my paternal grandparents' house [Nova Prata, 190km from Porto Alegre] for a week during the winter holidays, and *for a month or two months*, during the summer holidays", Marcelo explains. "I go to São Paulo in the summer holidays and I stay there for the *whole vacation*", Yasmin remarks. And because Felipe spends all his holidays at his maternal grandmother's, he considers this to be regular face-to-face contact: "Granny Regina is the granny I feel closest to. I'm always seeing her; *I always go there for the holidays*. I spend July and January there. *So I see her a lot!*" he explains. In his map, we can see that this is the grandmother Felipe feels closest to and the one considers himself to have the most face-to-face contact with [gray building in the center of the page], even though she lives in Natal, 3.929km from where he lives.



Fig. 150: Felipe's map, in which we can see his strong personal contact with his maternal grandmother, but only during the holidays.

It is the same with José, who, despite the fact that his maternal grandmother lives in Brasília, considers that he has regular face-to-face contact with her: “I see her *every holiday* and that's *a lot*, isn't it?”. When ties are strong and there are other means of communication, the children also manage to *be in their grandparents' house* virtually. “I know everything that goes on in my grandmother's house: I know that she goes every day to look after my great-grandmother, to see how she is, because I know that she's in a bad way. I know when she goes to the bank to pay her bills, when she goes to the supermarket and when she has visitors”, Felipe explains. “We talk all the time on the telephone, we send each other emails, we chat on MSN”, he adds. For Yasmin it is the same: “My granny, even though she lives in São Paulo, she knows about our lives... She sends me messages on Orkut and I send them back to her”, she says.

The children and their grandparents pay each other virtual visits very often. Examination of the data provided by Felipe, José, Yasmin and Alex, for example – whose grandparents live at least 700km away – shows that they are heavy users of the telephone,



email and MSN/Orkut, which enables them to establish *intimacy at a distance* (Rosenmayr & Kockeis, 1963), as suggested in the second chapter:

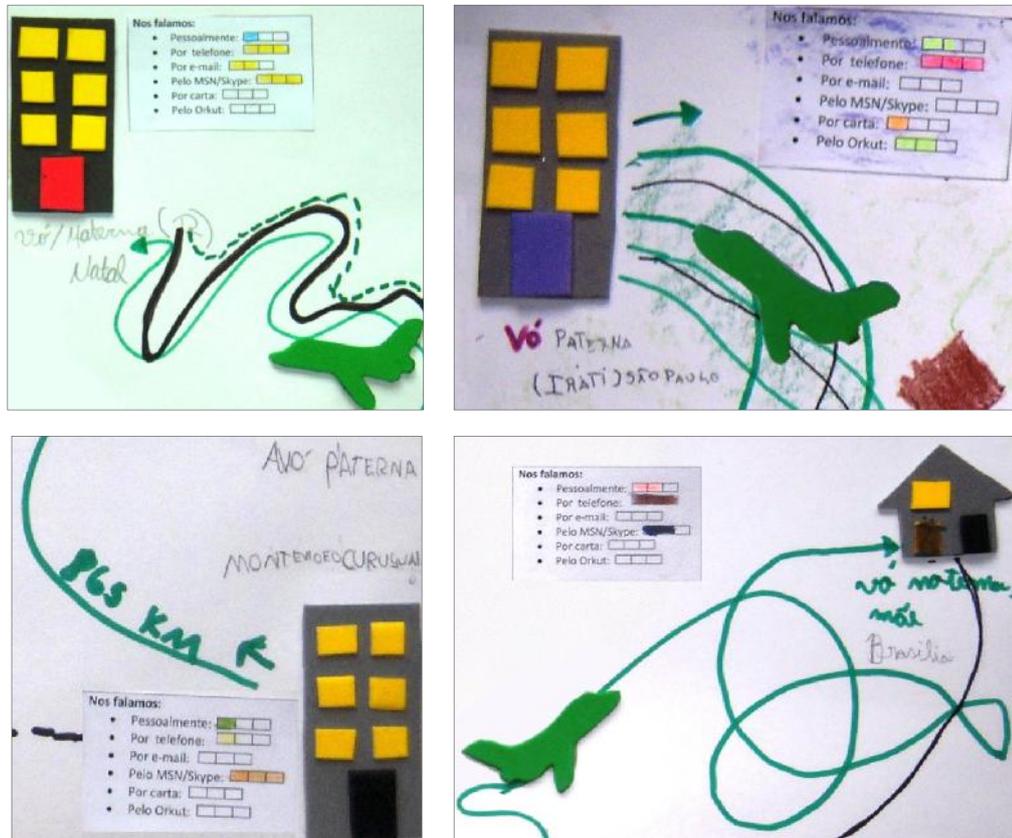


Fig. 151: From right to left: details of maps by Felipe, Yasmin (above), Alex and José (below), in which we can see the heavy use of communications technology.

“We talk by *webcam* and also a lot on the telephone!” José explains. “So we see each other too; I see my mother [who lives with his grandmother, in Brasília], my granny, their house...” (José). Alex, whose grandmother lives in Montevideo does the same: “We don’t only talk on the telephone, we use MSN a lot”. By telephone, Marcelo is able to find out not only about his grandparents, but about the farm they live on: “We talk a lot on the phone. We ring sometimes or they ring. So I ask about them, how the dogs are, what’s going on there, how the sheep are doing...”, he explains.

Although “virtual contact” has a different structure from “face-to-face contact”, most of the children do not think that this is a real problem for their relationships (even though personal contact is, as we saw in the second chapter, an important factor in determining preferences): “It’s not bad. I can see them even though they are far away and I know that I am going to see them sometime. So I don’t think it’s bad”, Felipe remarks. “I don’t think it



gets in the way. I like them just as much”, Érica says. “It doesn’t matter that they’re far away. What matters is that we keep talking”, Jaqueline says. “Nowadays, people can talk on MSN, Orkut, the telephone, the cell phone and when they meet”, Nanda states. “I saw a cartoon that said: *‘I love long distance relationships!’*. So I think that’s it. We don’t see each other, but we speak on the Internet, and write letters and emails”, João concludes.

This shows us that there is a new culture in the everyday life of families and the children who are part of them. The spaces they occupy now produce globalized childhoods in direct contact with the world. These spaces are reshaping contemporary childhood: the children have access to other ways of imagining, feeling, thinking and building up their childhood life. These *cyberchildren* (Dornelles, 2005), as we have seen in the examples cited, are able to talk with distant relatives in real time, by email, or using instant messages (MSN) and social networking sites. Using these interactive virtual media the children find new ways of socializing, of producing themselves as child subjects and develop new ways of relating to their families (Dornelles, 2005).

Telephone calls, messages, and webcam conversations are sure ways to keep these relationships alive, but the grandparents can also be present in other ways: “For me, distance doesn’t matter, because, in our house, we have lots of *photos of her*, so *I’m seeing her all the time*, I ring her up, I talk to her, and I go there when I can. *And my mother is always talking to her*”, Alexandre remarks. Fernanda likewise talks about the contact he has with his grandmother in ways that technology cannot provide: “We can talk on the telephone, by MSN, on the Internet. But what if granny doesn’t know how to use them? For me it doesn’t matter, because we are in her heart and she will always be where we are: she lives in my heart and I live in hers. As I see it, my granny will never go away, even when she dies”. When the distance is very great and financial and time constraints get in the way, the desire to meet remains. Baiano, who has never met and has no contact with his paternal grandparents, has such a desire<sup>53</sup>.

Baiano – All my father’s relatives live in Bahia. I even have a great-grandmother who lives there, except that I’ve never been there. There’s never been time and also my father can’t afford to go. I’d like to get to know them, but I can’t. I’ll only be able to go when my father does. When my father goes there, we’ll go with him. *If they lived nearer perhaps it would be easier* because then I would be able to get to

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<sup>53</sup> Baiano lives with his mother and his parents split up when he was only three. According to the boy, his father cannot afford to pay for him or his brother to visit him in the Northeast of the country.



know them... I filled in three hearts for this grandmother, because *I would really like to meet her*, I would like to visit her house, and play with her there. I don't know her, but *I'm sure she must be a good grandmother*, I'm sure. *I can sort of feel that she is a good grandmother.*

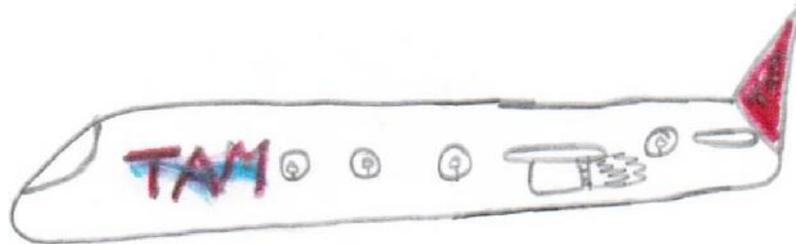


Fig. 152: In Pedro Henrique's\* drawing, a plane, the object that symbolically brings about family gatherings and reunions.

So, there is nothing like packing your bags and living this experience in real life: "When I arrive in Natal it's really good!" Felipe sighs. Some children even go alone: "Now I fly to my granny's and I go alone", Yasmin explains. "When my mum can't go, I go alone", says Felipe. "It sometimes happens... I've already been there [in Montevideo] on my own on the plane with my ten-year-old brother" (Alex). The children show how they gradually learn about themselves and the world using these spaces, their architecture and streets, which amount to a place of human occupation and a place of learning. According to Viñao Frago (2005):

The constitution of space as place [...] is the result of its occupation by human beings. Space is projected, seen or imagined; a place is constructed [...] Thus, an institution [be it a school, one's parents or one's grandparents' homes or, even the interactions that the children have using new communications and information technology make it possible for] a space to become a place. A specific place, with certain characteristics, where one goes, where one stays at certain times, and where one comes from... It is thus that a subjective idea arises from an objective one – space and place – an individual or collective experience of space as territory (p. 17).

## 4.2 The arrival: the experience of the house

A child never stops saying what he or she is doing or trying to do: exploring the means, the dynamic trajectories, and drawing the corresponding map [...] Maps should not be understood only in terms of extended space, in relation to a space made up of trajectories. There are also maps of intensity, of density, that speak of that which fills space, that which is subtended by the trajectory [...] It is this distribution of affect [...] that makes up a map of intensity. It is always an emotional constellation [...] A map of forces or intensities is not even derived from the body, the extension of previously existing image, a supplement or an aftermath [...] On



the contrary, it is the map of intensities that distributes the affect, whose bonds and valency make up the image of the body each instant, and image that can always be re-manipulated, transformed by the emotional constellations of which it is composed. (Deleuze, 1997, p. 73, p. 76-77).

I cite Deleuze at length to help us think about childhood, children, their relationships with their grandfathers and grandmothers and the ways they form emotional attachments. Children and grandparents are constantly producing each other and producing a map of trajectories, paths and routes that mark distances and proximities capable of building up their ways of being a subject in the world. On the basis of the intensity of the affect, as Deleuze notes, they constitute themselves and each other. A child is a coming into being. Coming into being is experimenting with the otherness of being human. Becoming is always a process, not a beginning, the means, or the end of a journey – it is an eternal process of becoming, in the ethics of life affirmations (Deleuze, 1997). Acts of becoming that eventually give rise to encounters.

Whether it is during the week or the holidays, the grandparents' house represents a "privileged space for the construction of and experiencing of friendships, companionship, affection, and play" (Lins de Barros, 1987, p.125). "It is a place where our fathers' or our mothers' parents live and they are very special people in our family" (Alexandra), they are "the people who look after us with much love and affection" (Érica). Thus, for most children, the grandparents' house "is a second home" (Baiano): "I live with my mother, but if anything happened to my home, I have my second home, which is my granny's house", Baiano explained. Alex agrees: "It is a second home because, if there were hurricane, and we didn't have a home any more, we would have our granny's house to go to", he points out. While the grandparents' house is a second home, because it can stand in for the house where the children live with their parents – just as the grandparents are the second parents because they can stand in for their children in their absence –, for children who live with their grandparents, this is their first home: "For me, it's *my first home* because I live with them", Luck reminds us; or "my grandmother's house is mine too!" as Fernanda exclaims. "*It is my life*, because I've lived with them since I was born", Marcelo testifies.

But when children do not share the same household as their grandparents, their home may be a home that is very similar to their own, in so far as they can explore its corners, the sofas, the stairways and the cupboards and come to know it intimately: "For me, my granny's home *is mine too*. I don't live with her, but *I feel at home* when I'm there.



There are lots of things that I like at her place”, Catarina explains. “I feel like it’s my home, because *I’m used to my granny’s house*. I lived there for a while, *I’m already used to living there*” (Diego). “I think it’s a wonderful, comfortable, cozy place” (Luca). It is “where I feel good” (Adriana). “A place where *I feel at home*, because I am close to something good” (João) and “where we can do the same things or more things than we do in our own homes” (Érica).

The grandparents’ home is a place where “you don’t have to stand on ceremony” (Baiano). It is where “I can play with the dog, Rebeca, where I can play with my dolls, where I really feel at home” (Gabriella). Gabriella also adds: “I think that *when we are at home, we feel at home*. And it’s the same at my granny’s! It’s like, when I go to one of my mother’s friend’s houses, I can’t go barefoot or run about, but at my granny’s I can!”. At her mother’s friend’s house, Gabriella is a visitor, an intruder, “who ‘should know her place and not dare to wander around from room to room” (Certeau, Giard & Mayol, 1996, p.203), while her grandmother’s house isn’t someone else’s place: “*I feel at home there!*” she exclaims. Natasha describes her grandmother’s house, where she herself lives, as a place where she has multiple experiences: “For me, my granny’s house is also *a museum, a fun park and a place of learning*, because I also learn a lot of things with her”. At many points in the course of research with children, we fail to notice their wisdom. In Ancient Greece, it was believed that one of the qualities of the wise man was to know how to live well, which included joy, happiness, pleasure, and well-being.

Oh, those Greeks! They knew how to live. For this, you need to stay on the surface, on the fold, skin deep, love appearances, believe in forms, tones, words, in the whole Olympus of appearances! Those Greeks were – deeply – superficial! (Nietzsche, 2001, p.15).

But what leads children to interpret their grandparents’ homes in this way? What, in their minds, are the experiences and meanings that make up the grandparents’ home?

#### 4.2.1 *A museum: the grandparent’s house as a place from the past*

Grandparents, even when they are not elderly, in the children’s eyes are people from another age: they are people who were children and young people at a different point in history, in a different era, with different fashions and lifestyles (Dolto, 1998b). As Lucas puts it, “they have memories from the old days!”. The grandparents’ home is thus a house that



contains things from the past that the children could never imagine: “My grandparents’ house *is like a museum*, because it has so many wonderful things, lots of *old things* that my grandmother has kept and I love going there and poking around and finding out what’s there” (Maria). For Natasha, the best antique at her grandmother’s house her ‘book case’: “She has a book case that is really old. And she has lots of *different books*, yellow and old, and a load of *old things* that she keeps”. Sometimes, old things are so fascinating and strange that the children try to imagine where they came from, with shapes that seem so strange nowadays that it appears to come from another world:

Pedro – My granny’s house is also a museum, because she has these huge records and that box to play them on, a round box which has some kind of needle that you place on the disk and it spins and music comes out... I’d never seen anything like it! I’ve only seen that at my grandmother’s house. And she’s also got lots of old tapes. Enormous things. I don’t know where she got them from!

The grandparents’ house may be old inside and out: “To my mind, my grandmother’s house is old because it’s falling apart. The bricks are crumbling”, José observes. “For me, my granny’s house is something different. It is old *because my granny is really old*. Because my granny likes really old things. Why were bathrooms so small in days gone by?” – Lion asks. “Because the bathroom in my grandmother’s house is tiny and you can’t get much stuff into it. It’s weird. And she has *lots of old things*, that maybe remind her of her past”, he adds. The old things Lion refers to are the furniture, which, as he himself recognizes, remind his grandmother of her past life. As Bachelard (2008) notes, “we owe the preservation of many of our memories to the house” (p.27).

For his register of his favorite places in his maternal grandmother’s house, Lion takes photos of two places: the bedroom and the living room: “It’s because I think it’s beautiful”, he says. “In the kitchen, she has a collection of old plates and three plaques on

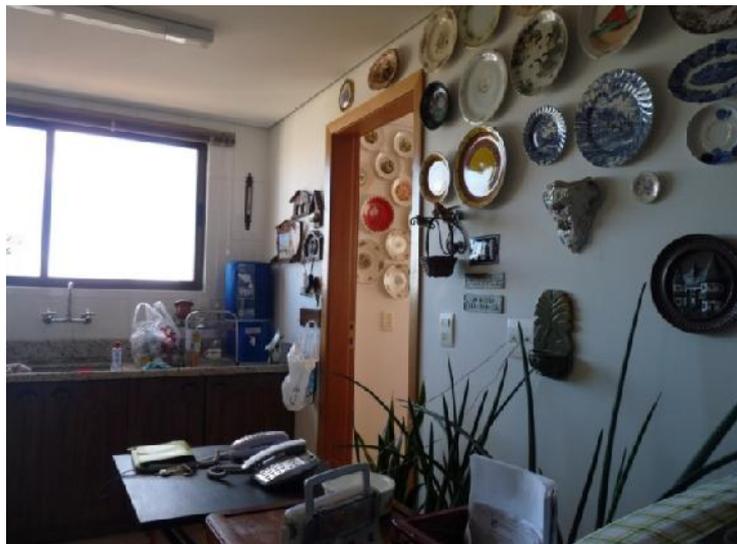


Fig. 153: Photograph of Lion’s maternal grandmother’s house: old plates.



the wall [just below the plates] which are the plaques from the houses she has lived in. I took a photo from outside the room because you also can see the other plates in the kitchen". The bedroom "is something from the past. You feel like you're in another age. There's this old painting", he says. "But I don't like things from the past. I like things from the future. The only



Fig. 154: Photograph of Lion's maternal grandmother's bedroom: "a place from the past"

thing that my grandmother has that is from the future is the television, and that's the only thing I'm interested in".

Gabriella also describes her grandmother's house as "something from the past". For her, the most intriguing of her grandmother's keepsakes are the childhood memories that she keeps on top of her wardrobe: "On top of my grandmother's wardrobe, there's loads of old books and shoe boxes from when she was a child. I've seen them there's loads of stuff inside", she says. Grandmother's box is a sort of treasure chest, full of "unforgettable things" (Bachelard, 2008, p.97). But the past and the vestiges of her grandmother's childhood are not only packed away in boxes. Grandparents and grandchildren can also share the feeling of being a child, reviving games and toys that formed part of the grandparent's own past: "I learn a lot of old things with my grandmother, such as how to play different games. I have one at home that she gave me. When she bought it, she couldn't remember how to play it, but she told me that she used to play with it when she was a child and the man in the shop taught her again how to play it and she taught me", recounts José. "My granny taught me to play an old game. She kept one for me and for my cousin", Gabriella says. Érica even started playing with a toy that was her grandmother's. "This doll (See photograph below) was my grandmother's. I love playing with her. When I was little, I used to play at being her mother and her teacher".



Fig. 155: Photograph of the doll that Érica's paternal grandmother used to play with when she was a child.

Sometimes, the grandchildren also come into contact with the vestiges of their own parents' childhood, discovering fragments of their life as children when they lived in that house: "At my grandparents' house, I keep my pajamas in a part of the wardrobe that my mother used to use. *My mother's wardrobe is full of stickers*, which my grandmother used to bring back for her from her travels. So I found a little space in the wardrobe to keep my pajamas" (Adriana). Kátia also reuses her mother's toys when she goes to her grandmother's

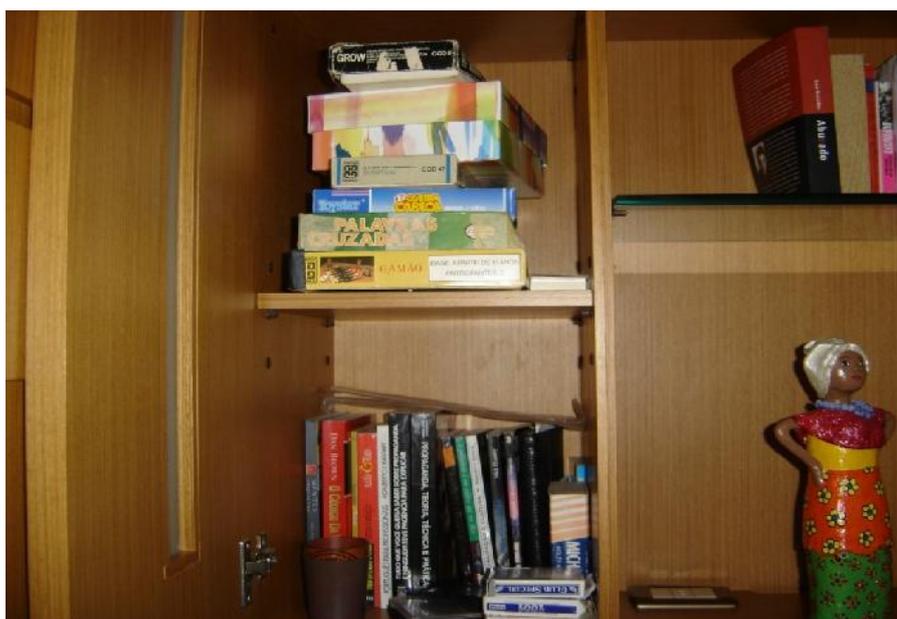


Fig. 156: Photograph showing the games Kátia's mother used to play when she was a child.



house: “This here [See photograph above] is the games cupboard in my aunt’s room, right at the top of the house. These games are really old. They are from *when my mother was still a child* and we play with them a lot still today. Whenever I go there, we play these games a lot. My mother still hasn’t forgotten them” (Kátia).

As the grandparents’ home contains things from another age, it may also be an enigmatic space, which enralls the children and haunts their imagination. “I seriously think that my grandmother’s house is haunted”, Lion says, and tells the following story:

Lion – Once, I was there with my cousins and it was all dark. The house was all shut up: the windows, everything, even the door was locked. There was no wind, but we heard a knock on the door. Another time I was there, I saw the shape of a flesh-colored head, just the head, floating there...

Gabriella also thinks that her stepfather’s mother’s house is haunted, because “she has lots of old things; those paintings of her mother, like they used to paint in those days. Loads of old things. Really old Mônica cartoons. Those things you put candles in. I don’t know what they’re called”. She tells the following story about the house:

Gabriella – Once I was there at night and I went into the rooms at the back and, there was a picture of her mother there. I think she’s already dead. And it gave me a scare and I fell down. And the candle fell on top of me, but it had already gone out. I was really scared!!!

Lucas also has a ghost story to tell about his grandparents’ home:

Lucas – I and my older cousin – he’s one year older than me – went to the countryside and there was this field full of sheep. So we jumped over the fence and there were lots of rams. And we ran through the rams to a little house and locked ourselves in. Then we started to hear the voices of our grandparents calling us... Even though they are already dead. So, we ran out of the house... I couldn’t really make out what they were saying and neither could my cousin! Then we went to church and prayed...

“I’m scared of going to the houses of people who have died”, Felipe remarks. “When there are those old portraits on the wall and it seems as though they are watching us”, Lucas explains. Haunted houses represent some kind of adventure, like a ride on a “ghost-train” (Lion), which stirs up mixed feelings: on the one hand it is scary, on the other it stimulates curiosity and a desire to continue playing. Grandparent’s houses can thus be the settings for great adventures.



### 4.2.2 *Behind the door there is another door: the grandparents' house as a place of adventure*

It is not only things from the past that make grandparents' houses mysterious places. They are also places where the children can live out adventures great and small, trying out new situations. "It is always an adventure staying at my granny and grandpa's house. Something always happens there. There is always an adventure waiting for me there! Once, I even had a bad adventure... I was running about with my cousin and I broke a vase that my granny had had for thousands of years and *it was an adventure hiding from her!*", Alexandra says laughing. Adventures of this kind, played out in houses with cellars and ghosts are mixed with fantastic stories of heroes, beggars, noblemen, princesses, princes and paupers, rich maidens who lived in castles and royal palaces.

The stories of Hans Christian Andersen, the Brothers Grimm and other authors of so-called children's literature, show how children should behave so as not to stray from their parents' side. They call attention to the evils of the world and bring hope that ugly ducklings may one day be transformed into elegant swans (Dornelles, 2011). It is with the use of this powerful imagination that the children participating in this study tell of their adventures at their grandparents' houses. In these settings the children face risks, they want to Wander around in little explored places, taking on the role of true detectives and archeologists in the dark attics and cellars. According to Corso and Corso (2006),

[...] children are always interested in mysteries; when the mystery wears off, they reinvent it. Likewise, they are fascinated by anything that arouses in them the vast array of different kinds of fear. Fear is one of the most important seeds of fantasy and invention, much of which stem from the same sources of mystery and sanctity. Fear can be provoked by the realization of our insignificance in the universe, the fleetingness of life, the vast dark realms of the unknown. It is an essential feeling that protects us from the risk of death. Because of it, we have also developed feelings of curiosity and a propensity to be courageous, which goes beyond a mere survival instinct and expands our zest for life (p. 17).

We can thus imagine that, when children poke around in every nook and cranny of the house, little goes unnoticed:

Pedro – My granny's house has an underground house... A house underneath it! My granny's house stands on the ground, and there's a kind of door under the carpet. Except that now she's had it taken out and put a floor down, because when



the wind blew the door was always blowing open. So she put in a new door leading down to the underground house...



Fig. 157: Alice, from *Alice in Wonderland*, opening the door to find out what is behind it

Alexandra – My granny's house also has an underground house, except that *my granny doesn't know. It was me that found it...* In the garage there is one of those things that looks like a well. My cousin and I were there and we were playing and we stepped on it and found the little door. We looked inside and it wasn't a sewer; it was a little house. So we now have three secret places: one next to my grandmother's bidet, another behind the sofa, and this little door.

José – This is where I hide [See Photograph below]. It is *a hiding place that nobody knows about*, because nobody goes there. I go in here where there's a railing and I close everything up. I shut the windows and draw the curtains and there you have it. I stay there in the dark. No-one can find me.

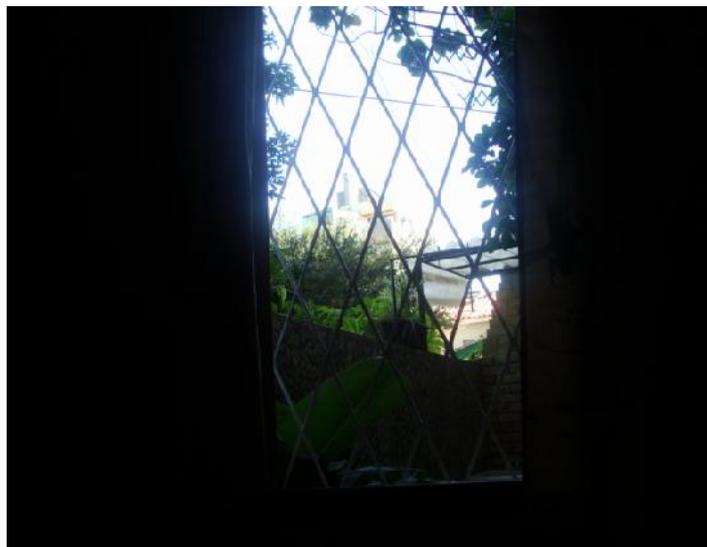


Fig. 158: The dark: José's hiding place in the house he lives in with his paternal grandmother.



When the grandparents live in small towns or in the countryside<sup>54</sup>, the adventure is even greater. In the countryside or in small villages, the children can explore uncharted territory and experience pleasures and adventures that children who live in the big city do not usually have. Alexandre tells us how he adores going to Veranópolis, where his maternal grandmother lives, because, there, “he can play in the square, go to the drug store and [even] do granny’s shopping for her”. He says how “here, in Porto Alegre, I never do this. I have done it, it was only once, in the grocery store next door. At my granny’s, I always do this. It’s not like Porto Alegre, where you have to be careful when you go out, keeping a look out. It’s much easier there! If I want to, I put fifty Reals in my pocket and go out!”, he explains. João too remarks that when he goes to the countryside to visit his grandfather, he “feels really free” to venture out alone across the fields. “There, my mum says: ‘Son! Go to the corner shop!’; ‘Son! Go to the well!’; ‘Son! Go to your grandmother’s!’, and I go... And there I can go alone! On horseback or on foot”, he remarks.

“The world in which we live today is overloaded and dangerous” (Giddens, 1991, p.19), permeated with fear, a symbol of our insecurity and uncertainty. For Bauman (2006), human beings are going through a kind of *derivative fear* that guides the way they behave and move about in the world. This field is, in Bauman’s words, “a stable mental structure that could be better described as a feeling of being susceptible to danger; a feeling of insecurity [...] and vulnerability” (p.7). Insecurity because “if the danger becomes concrete, there will be little or no chance of fleeing or successfully defending oneself” (p.7), vulnerability, because “the world is full of dangers that can assail us at any moment with or without warning” (p.7). This why these children, who live in big cities, in which there are constantly muggings, kidnappings, and threats, can sense that in rural areas there are more opportunities to have adventures without fear, and enjoy the singular experience of being alone.

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<sup>54</sup> It is worth pointing out that Rio Grande do Sul is a Brazilian State that has a lot of natural landscapes. Its rural parts are covered in forests (such as Mata das Araucárias) and plains (such as Campanha Gaúcha). Much of the cattle and sheep in the country come from the extensive livestock farms of the State, where milk is also produced. Rice, wheat and soy is also grown.



Accustomed to leisure being in the shopping malls and hypermarkets they frequent, buying things and going to the movies (as Felipe and Alexandre's\* drawing show in the pictures below) –, these children, when they visit their grandparents in the countryside or in small towns, can enjoy the healthy outdoor air, have contact with farm equipment, fruit-trees and all sorts of animals. In these settings, they can live out adventures grand and small, as the outside of their grandparents' houses is an important place of discovery. "At my grandparents' I can go horse-riding, ride on my grandpa's tractor, and, sometimes, help with the barbecue", Marcelo explains. Érica tells how when she visits her paternal grandparents, who live on a farm, she changes into a pair of sneakers and goes walking in the woods: "My grandfather lives on a farm and he likes to do things on the farm with us. [...] We go walking in the woods and I get all scratched!".

Betina also sees the time she spends at her grandparents' house [in rural Campinas do Sul, 407km from Porto Alegre] as a great adventure: "There I wake up at the crack of dawn, when the cock crows. At 6:30 I'm already awake! Because there, I feel like getting up early! There is sun and birds singing. So, I wake up, I have breakfast, I put on the dungarees they have for me and I go to work", she says. The fact that her grandparents' house is in the countryside is so



Fig. 159: Felipe's drawing: a place where he goes with his maternal grandmother. "We go to the mall, and chat over an ice-cream".



Fig. 160: Alexandre's\* drawing illustrating a day he went with his father and his grandparents to the Iguatemi shopping mall, in Porto Alegre. There, they went to the restaurant, bought a toy called a Miconhoco and looked around the shops.



striking for her that, when drawing the route from her house to her grandparents', she marks the boundary between the urban and the rural with a mud track and a large number



Fig. 161: Map of Betina's grandparents' house, showing the boundary between the urban and the rural areas.

of trees, as we can see in her map below: "When we leave the city, after Campinas, we begin to see the cobblestones and we know that we are arriving at my grandmother's", she says.

At her grandparents' house, Betina is an adventurer: "One day, I went to get an egg from my granny's chicken coop and the dungarees I was wearing got caught on the wire and pulled open the chicken coop door and two or three chickens got out. But I managed to get them all back in. I got a big stick, that they use to pick oranges from the orange tree, and drove them back into the coop. But it was a scare!", she recounts. The grandparents' house is situated in a "world of adventure". There, "my grandpa teaches me how to get chickens' eggs without getting pecked and it's great fun. My grandpa distracts their attention and I take the egg without them pecking me", as she illustrates in her drawing below. "I ride on Pérola, which is my grandfather's mare" and I went there "and I did the coolest things I have ever done: picking apples from very high up in the tree without granny helping me".



Fig. 162: Betina picking apples from high up in the tree on her grandparents' farm.



Fig. 163: Betina riding her grandfather's mare, which is "a bit wild". He is at her side, egging her on.



Fig. 164: Betina fetching eggs from the chicken coop. It is interesting to note her facial expression, indicating "butterflies in the stomach", as she puts it.

According to Betina, her grandmother is always telling her to take care: "You'll cut yourself! You'll scratch yourself! Be careful!", but her grandfather encourages her to explore the farm: "Careful of what? She has to run about, she has to hurt herself now and then, she has to take risks...", he says. Betina seems to take her grandfather's advice literally, as she herself tells:

Betina – There was one great day when my cousin and I went out and it started to rain. And we thought, "Oh, it's just a shower!" It was drizzling... And then it started to get heavier and there was thunder and we took shelter in a large dog's kennel. With the dog watching us... And when it eased off, we went to play football and it began to rain harder again, so we got something to eat, because we were starving and it was 5pm and time for a snack. So, we had something to eat and when we went back everything was flooded! Then we played football again. Except that, instead of the ball we kicked the dirt and before long it was all mud there too. So we and everything got covered in mud. That day was great!



Fig. 165: Alexandre (in orange trunks) and his cousins in a situation very similar to the one recounted by Betina: out in the rain at grandma's. "My granny was worried sick about us", she says.

The countryside also has its own smell. Far from the pollution and gray buildings of big cities, the children can experience different smells. "When I remember my granny's house in Cruz Alta, I remember the smell of the countryside. I remember the smell of manure, of grass, of animals", Luca says. Betina, remembers "the smell of their house", "the smell of earth, grass, of the rain...", the smell of "damp earth, damp vegetation" (Alexandre) which the city, hemmed in by tall concrete buildings and long roads, no longer has to offer. "The smell of the countryside! The smell of the countryside is wonderful!" João remembers. "When it rains, that's great! But even when it doesn't rain... You have pure air there. You can breathe, even when you've got a blocked nose, it unblocks it and you can breathe the pure air!" the boy explains. The smell of earth, vegetation and animals, which is so symbolic for these children, is not only to be found in their grandparents' houses but in their own memories.



Fig. 166: João's drawing. The smell he remembers when he thinks of his grandfather's house. Under his drawing, he has written: "The woods in the rain (damp fields). The drawing shows woods and rain. (It's the smell)".



### 4.2.3 *A Fun Park the grandparents' house as a place of entertainment*

As we saw in the first chapter, play is an integral part of child culture, representing one of the richest and most elementary forms in which children communicate and express themselves. Play is an activity which begins at birth and is a way of appropriating the world through the senses (Kishimoto, 2002). After birth, the baby gradually explores its own body. As Altman points out, "it feels its own hands, holds its feet, and touches its nose, ears, and mouth, awakening its senses to a world of discoveries. It is an adventure to discover oneself and recognize sounds, shapes and colors. The child plays as it is awakened the surrounding world." (Altman, 2007, p.231). For Dutch historian, Johan Huizinga, *Homo* is not only *sapiens*, but also *ludens*; play forms an undeniable part of his existence: "it is possible to reject, should one wish, almost all the abstractions: justice, beauty, truth, good, God. It is possible to reject seriousness, but not play" (Huizinga, 2000, p.9).

Play also takes place in space: indoors, in the various rooms of the house, under the table, up the stairs and beyond. It is in the street, in the school yard, at the bedside, behind the fridge, on the sofa. Play follows children wherever they go and invades the home of their grandparents. There is no space where it does not occur; no corner of the house that it does not transform. Everything becomes possible under the curious eye and creative energy of a child.

Every game plays itself out and takes form within a previously defined material or imaginary field, be it deliberate or spontaneous. So that there is no formal difference between play and worship, in so far as the "sacred place" cannot formally be distinguished from the field of play. The arena, the board, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the tennis court, the court room and so forth, all have the same form and function as a field of play, that is, forbidden, isolate, closed, sacred spaces, within which certain rules are obeyed. All of them are temporary worlds within the habitual world, dedicated to a special activity. (Huizinga, 2000, p.11).

In the grandparents' house, play can take wing. "My granny's house is very different from mine. Everything is different... *in my house, I am quieter* but there I'm more excited, *I play more*", Yasmin says. "Our grandparents' house is somewhere where we can make a mess, because, at home, we can't. Mum is a bore. She's always saying, '*You'll make a mess in your room!*'" (Nanda) but, at granny's no, "*that's a fun place, somewhere to play and make a mess* and, somewhere where mum's don't talk!" (Leonardo). Many children, therefore, describe their grandparents' houses as "somewhere where we play" (Daniele), "somewhere



where we can play a lot” (Kátia), “jump on the bed, make a mess, and then eat lots of good stuff” (Carol). It is a place where children can break the rules and where play is also synonymous with disorder: toy cars can fly across the carpet, the kitchen table can be turned into a cabin, a wardrobe can become a hiding place. As Girardello (2006) tells us, “the attitude adopted by adults in the environment in which the child lives is [...] a factor that influences his or her imagination. The role of adults as intermediaries between children and the physical environment and the social atmosphere created by the family make a difference in the imagination of young people” (p. 58).

Since the grandparents’ house is a place where many children have more freedom of imagination and creativity than they do in their own homes, Carol presents “granny’s house” with a special symbol: “When I went to Gramado, I bought a plaque for my granny. It’s made of wood, and written on it are the words *‘In grandma’s house, I do what I like’*. I gave it to her because, when I am there, I do all these things. I do what I like anywhere”. If the children play “everywhere”, in order to discover the places where they play around their grandparents’ houses – or, at least, the ones these boys and girls want to show us – we must outline the topology of these places, opening the doors to each of the rooms.

### *The Living Room*

The front door, symbol of the threshold between public and private, usually leads to the living room, a place for receiving outsiders. The living room is a space given over to social relations: it is where people usually sit down on the sofa or eat together: “The living room is where I go *when I want to talk*”, says Jaqueline. “We sit on the sofa, *talk* and watch TV together” (Jaqueline, Fig. 167). “It’s an important part of my home, because that’s where we – I, my mother and my grandmother – spend loads of time sitting down together”, Fernanda adds. “Yesterday my mother was sitting here (the beige sofa), my granny here and me here (the striped sofa) and



Fig. 167: Photograph of Jaqueline’s living room, where she talks with her grandmother.



we were watching the soccer match between Grêmio and Santos”, she says (Fig. 168). As can be seen from the photographs, the furniture is arranged in such a way as to facilitate interaction, enabling “everyone to change place and sit wherever they like” (Proust, 2002, p.37), alongside or in front of each other.



Fig. 168: Photograph of Fernanda’s living room where she talks with her grandmother.

The sofa is also positioned here in such a way as to provide relaxation and entertainment. “That’s where I go when I want to *sit down and sleep and watch TV*” (Adriana); “that’s where I *read*” (Catarina); “it’s where I do cartwheels” (Nicolle) or “I sink into it, lose myself in it, because my granny’s sofa is so comfortable that it seems to swallow me up” (Luca). Nicolle even expresses her feelings for this piece of furniture, as if it were “a friend to her”, to use Bachelard’s expression (2008, p.84): “My granny’s sofa is really soft. *I love it!*”, she says. For Carol, the sofa is the place “where I feel most comfortable. I arrive, lie down, and go ‘Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh!’ I take off my coat and slump onto the sofa”. As the sofa represents for these children the very essence of the well-being that the living room provides, it holds a special place in their photographs, further underlining its importance.



Fig. 169: Photograph of Nicolle’s maternal grandparents’ sofa, where she does cartwheels.



Fig. 170: Photograph of Adriana’s paternal grandparents’ sofa, where she goes to sleep or watch television.



Fig. 171: Photograph of the armchair Alex uses at his maternal grandparents' house

Sometimes, the children also identify this as “their place” in the house, especially when it is an armchair: “I spend lots of time here! I’m always in this armchair [See photo below] watching something... I do almost everything here: watching TV, talking, playing *Play Station*, when I take it with me, or Nintendo” (Alex). “This armchair is yours! Your grandparents use it, but when you go there, it’s yours!” Nanda concludes, when she hears her friend’s story. “Yes, it’s more or less like that”, the boy replies.

The children move quickly on from the sofa to the rug: “The rug’s where I most like to play” (See photo on the left below), says José; adding, “That’s where I play with my toys, my cars, and with my dog, Lara”. For Luca, there is nowhere more comfortable than his grandparent’s rug:

“This is where I play. This rug is really, really comfortable! I get my toys, take off my shoes, and play. It’s great for playing!” (Luca, photograph on the right).



Fig. 172: Photo of the rug in Roger’s paternal grandparents’ house, where he plays with his dog (in the photo) and his toys.



Fig. 173: Photo of the rug in Luca’s ‘borrowed’ grandparents’ house, where he loves to play.

In children’s play, the sofa can also take on other forms and meanings. It can become a shop counter – “I play shop on my granny’s sofa. I get some things I have and I play at selling them” (Catarina) – or a means of transport – “we play traveling on my granny’s sofa in Santa Maria” (Catarina). “My cousin and I”, the girl goes on, “[...] pack our bags with the clothes we take when we’re traveling and we pretend that the sofa is the plane and our



granny's bedroom the hotel. We sit down, put our bags down here [between the armchairs]



Fig. 174: Drawing of Catarina's paternal grandparents' living room. She and her cousin use the armchairs to play at traveling.

and play", Catarina says. For Huizinga (2000), children are endowed, from a tender age, with a great potential for imagination, which leads them to see things as things that they are not,

or as something more beautiful, more noble, or more dangerous than it actually is. They pretend to be a prince, a wicked witch, or a tiger. Children are literally "transported" by pleasure and go beyond themselves to the extent that they almost come to believe that they actually are whatever they imagine themselves to be, without, however, entirely losing sight of "everyday reality". Rather than a false reality, their representation of the world is a realized appearance: it is "imagination", in the original sense of the word (p.14).

In this game of make-believe, the furniture takes on a new life, serving the purposes of the game. The coffee table becomes an ice-rink: "Here I play that I am skating and the cut-glass ornaments are the trophies I have won in the competition" [Photo on the left], and this place "is really cool [Photo on the right]. Here I pretend that I work in this bar. I sell drinks. I pour them out. But only when my grandpa says, 'Nicky, serve me a drink?' And when it's Coca-Cola, I get a glass and pour coke into it, because there's always coke in the fridge", Nycolle says.



Fig. 175: The cut-glass ornaments in Nycolle's maternal grandparents' house, which are her trophies, while the table top is her skating rink.



Fig. 176: The bar in Nycolle's maternal grandparents' house, where she plays at being a waitress.

When the dining table is in the living room, this too can become an important space. However, it would seem to be less important than other pieces of furniture. While 19 children mention the sofa, only five mention the dining table, whether in the living room or the kitchen. When the dining table is mentioned it is either as space for different kinds of play or as the place where grandparents and grandchildren share meals.



Fig. 177: The dining table as a *space for play*: "When I was little, I used to play dinosaurs on this table, but I've grown out of that. But, I love the room, because it brings back memories. I used to make bridges out of Lego and the dinosaurs would run away from the carnivores over them. This is what I used to do on this table" (Fernando)



Fig. 178: The dining table as a *space for meal-times*: "This is where I sit down with my granny and grandpa. This is where we have lunch". (Melissa)

What is served at the dining table is usually prepared in the kitchen, the room where the grandparents perform their culinary alchemy.



## The Kitchen

The kitchen is a place to take a break. It is where the grandchildren go, to get their strength back as they play and enjoy the delicacies that their grandparents prepare. “My granny Maria de Lurdes makes delicious food, that smells wonderful and *you can smell it from the bedroom*”, André\* says. This is where the children eat “pasta with bean sauce” (Baiano), “corn and chicken lasagna” (Adriana), “ice cream” (Carol) and “chocolate cake with icing sugar on top” (Alexandre). It is in the kitchen that Maria’s grandmother makes “lunch that makes your mouth water”. The kitchen is unforgettable, because of its flavors: How can you forget the chocolate cake your grandmother used to make? “Do you know chocolate cookie pie? My grandmother’s cookie pie has plenty of chocolate! It’s made of cookies, chocolate and cream... and she prepares the cream, then she puts cookies, pours cream, puts cookies, pours cream, and puts cookies... and finally she pours lots of chocolate cream on the top! My grandmother’s cookies pie has really lots of chocolate cream on the top!” Nanda remembers.



Fig. 179: The smell of food as strikingly drawn by Diego.

The children’s culinary memories reveal “the glorious treasure of the tastes of childhood.” (Certeau et al., 1996, p.255). A world dominated by grandmothers.<sup>55</sup> When asked to remember their favorite dishes, most children refer to the magic hands of these women, who can cook “beans like no-one else; beans that taste of cheese” (Pedro), or who can make a “chocolate cake with strawberries and cream, and hundreds and thousands on top, *that I can remember as if it were yesterday*” (Nicolle). As Pedro says, what grandmothers cook cannot be imitated, it is something “that not even my mum knows how to do” (Ashley); and it is something that sticks in the children’s sensory memory. That is why Diego says that “whenever I smell *carreteiro*<sup>56</sup>, I remember my grandmother”.

Smell is the first sense organ to develop in the embryo and our most direct sense. The connection between a certain smell and an experience is immediate: the olfactory

<sup>55</sup> The gender issues involved here were addressed in Chapter 2 in the section on “Gender and Styles”, and will not therefore be mentioned again here. It is worth pointing out, however, that, there were also grandfathers in this study who cook, although they are numerically inferior to the grandmothers.

<sup>56</sup> Carreteiro is a dish typical of the Southern region of Brazil, made of rice and sun-dried meat.



memory recognizes the smell and communicates its meaning to the body, triggering the emotions that were associated with it in the past. While visual signs and sounds need to be processed by the thalamus before arriving at the cognitive parts of the brain, olfactory messages go directly from the nose to the olfactory cortex and are processed instantaneously. Furthermore, the cerebral cortex is involved with the limbic system and the amygdale – which is responsible for processing emotions – which means that there is a close association between smells, feelings and memories (Diniz, 2010).

Taste is also important. Taste brings us back to our memories, transporting us to special places and moments in our childhood. It's so that the French writer Marcel Proust describes the moment he raised a piece of *madeleine* cake to his mouth in a spoonful of tea:

No sooner had the warm liquid, and the crumbs with it, touched my palate than a shudder ran through my whole body, and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary changes that were taking place... And once I had recognized the taste of the crumb of madeleine soaked in her decoction of lime-flowers which my aunt used to give me (although I did not yet know and must long postpone the discovery of why this memory made me so happy), immediately the old grey house upon the street, where her room was, rose up like the scenery of a theatre to attach itself to the little pavilion, opening on to the garden, which had been built out behind it for my parents (the isolated panel which until that moment had been all that I could see); and with the house the town, from morning to night and in all weathers, the Square where I was sent before luncheon, the streets along which I used to run errands, the country roads we took when it was fine... so in that moment all the flowers in our garden and in M. Swann's park, and the water-lilies on the Vivonne and the good folk of the village and their little dwellings and the parish church and the whole of Combray and of its surroundings, taking their proper shapes and growing solid, sprang into being, town and gardens alike, from my cup of tea. (Proust, 2006, p. 51 and 53).

The memory of tastes in combination with the memory of the house is also evoked by Amanda in the drawing reproduced below, in which she is eating cake in her maternal grandparents' kitchen: "We always eat cake there at that table", the girl explains. Just as, in Proust's memoir, the *madeleine* triggers his olfactory memory, for the children who participated in this study, the unforgettable tastes are those of cakes (mostly chocolate and carrot cakes) – this may explain why Betina says that the

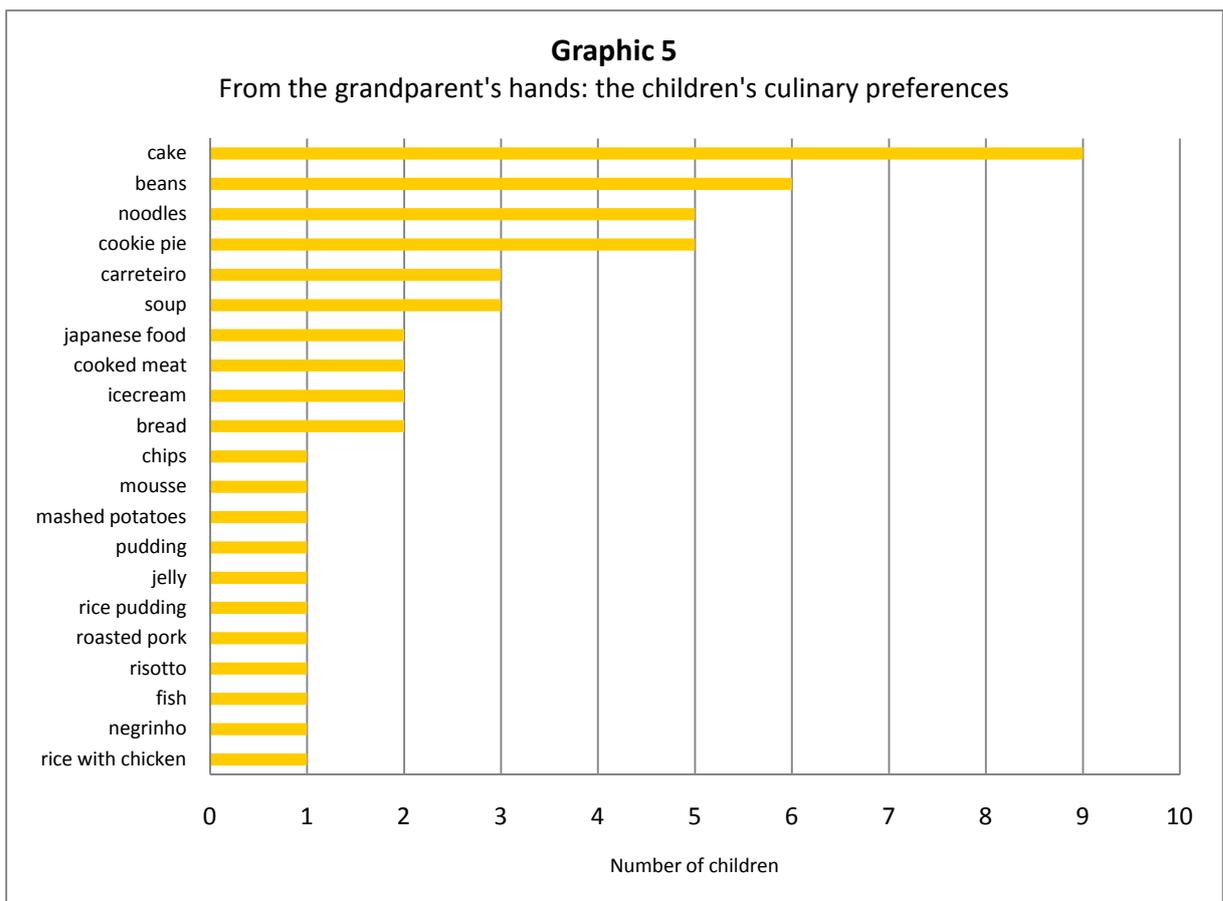


Fig. 180: Amanda's Drawing. The memory of a taste and the memory of a place.



grandmothers “are people who make cake! Very good cakes for us to eat!” – and beans, as we can see in the graph reproduced below. The reason for this is that our tastes and dietary habits do not exist in isolation. They depend on economics factors, such as access, availability and income; and cultural factors, which are related to our geographical origins, religion and family habits (Menezes, 2006). This explains why the dishes that appear in the list of the children’s favorites are traditional Brazilian ones, or, in the case of Yasmin, who has Japanese ancestors, Japanese ones. As Certeau et al. (1996) put it,

[...] “liking” is also a confusing term, linked to the multiple game of attractions and repulsions, based on our childhood habits, magnified by our memory, or turned upside down by our adult desire to free ourselves from them... We like what [our mothers] liked, sweet or savory, jam in the morning or cereals, tea or coffee, olive oil (if you are from Provence), *gaffelbitter* (if you are Scandinavian), so that it makes more sense to say that we eat our memories, the safest ones, tempered by the kindness and rituals of our early childhood (p.249).



It is in the kitchen that children also learn to have fun cooking with their grandparents. They help to “make pancakes” (Luiza\*), “to make chicken broth” (Leonardo), “to check the milk doesn’t boil over” (Pedro), “to beat cake mixture” (Alexandra), “to cut



salad" (Betina), "to chop onions" or to "write the shopping list" (Leonardo): "When my granny makes the chicken broth that I love, I help her to cut the potatoes, the carrots and to make the chicken stock", Leonardo says. Maria says she "plays baker's shop" with her grandmother: "While she makes the bread, I make little turtles out of dough. I bake them along with the bread and then I eat them". And, as the children cook and have fun, they also learn, preserving "the memory of lived gestures and consistencies" (Certeau et al., 1996, p.219):



Fig. 181: Luiza\* and her grandmother making pancakes in the kitchen. We can see "the practical skills" the pancake, and knowledge of the ingredients used.

"My granny makes home-made ice-lollies! *I know how to do it*: she makes the juice, puts it in a mold, puts in sticks and *freezes them until they are hard*", Luck says. "I can even give you the recipe for my granny's cake, because I make it too! Condensed milk and chocolate. You mix the chocolate and the condensed milk to make a kind of *thin paste*, and you put it in the bottom of the mold. Then you get biscuits and put them on top. It's really great!" (Melissa). Melissa\* also describes a time when she was cooking with her grandmother:

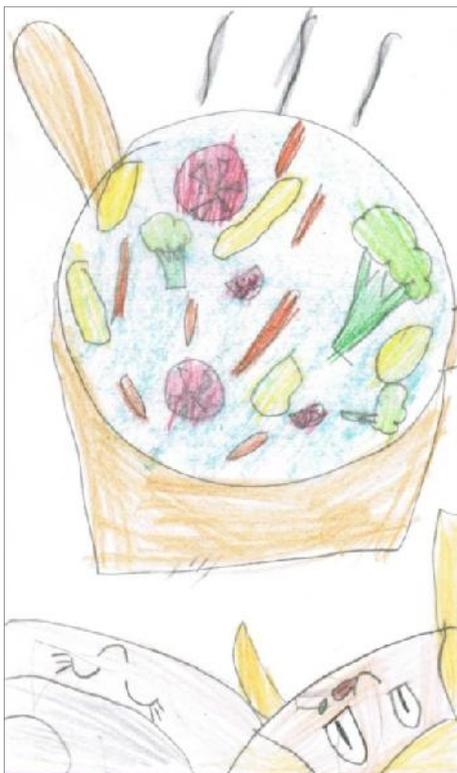


Fig. 182: The soup that Melissa\* (girl on the right) makes with her grandmother (woman on the left). In the drawing, we can see the ingredients mentioned in the recipe.

Melissa\* – First we got all the ingredients and equipment ready. Then we looked at the recipe: she put three eggs in the bowl, while I put some water in a pot. I put six pieces of broccoli in the pot and she shredded a carrot and put that in too. She peeled a tomato and chopped it and I put it in the pot. I added a pinch of salt and she added some chicken stock. We brought it all to the boil and added eggs. It was delicious!

It is in the kitchen or the pantry that grandparents keep the ingredients, which are in the children's gastronomical dreams. Their cupboards are

"larders were sensuous sanctuaries where children could dawdle indefinitely, as in a library,



amid the multi-scented treasures of jams and jellies, herbs and spices, smoked meats and other foodstuffs ‘put up’ by grandmother” (Kornhaber & Woodward, 1985, p.134). This explains why Melissa took a photo of the pantry in her grandmother’s house (See below): “This is where my granny works and *where she keeps all the tasty food*. In this larder there are snacks, sweets, popcorn, chocolate... and everything she needs to make *marvelous*



Fig. 183: The pantry in Melissa’s grandparents’ house. “The cupboard on the right is closed, but that’s where she keeps the delicacies”, the girl says. We can see stacked up cartons of milk.

*food*”. Luck describes his grandparents’ house as a place where “there are sweets and good things to eat”, while André says that it is “a McDonald’s that always has good food! In Mc there’s loads of good hamburger and at my granny’s too!”. For Yasmin it is a “source of chocolate. There’s always chocolate there! When I go to my granny’s, she gives me loads of junk food and my mum doesn’t like this that much, but I love it!”. And, as her grandmother lives in São Paulo and they only see each other during the holidays, “she sends me lots of sweets in the mail too”, thereby extending the reach of her delicacies.

But not all grandmothers cook. Some of “the new grandmothers” (Attias-Donfut & Segalen, 1998) don’t like to go near the stove. Lion says he doesn’t have great memories of his grandmother’s cooking: “My granny *doesn’t make many things*. She only knows how to cook pasta. I like the smell of my aunt’s cooking!” For Kátia, the culinary memories come from her grandfather: “It’s always my grandpa who cooks! *My granny never cooks*. She’s just



like my mum; it's a miracle if she cooks!". So, when I ask José to think of an unforgettable smell, he thinks of the restaurant: "Yes! For me, it's Japanese food! My mum and I and my granny eat a lot *in the restaurant!*".

After meals, it is time to do the washing up and, far from being just a domestic chore, for Gabriella and Érica, it is another source of fun:

Gabriella – Oh. There's something I want to say. *I always enjoy washing up at my granny's and I always ask her to let me do it.* I like to do my granny's washing up, because she's got a lot of crockery and it's fun. I like water! I play with it as it comes out of the tap.

Érica – I like it at my granny's, because *she always lets me wash up* when I go there... One day, my cousin, who is younger than me, was going to do the washing up, and she asked me to join her and I did. And I liked it immediately and started to wash up. It's cool! You get wet, there are soap suds...



Fig. 184: Photograph and drawing of the kitchen sink in her grandparents' house where Érica likes to wash up.

As Dolto notes, when children play with water, they are, in some way, "returning to their origins" (Doltp, 1999b, p.114); and, thanks to the challenges that the water presents them they also learn about the density, buoyancy and the slipperiness of objects, which encourages them to continue playing.

## The Bathroom

Playing with water also occurs in the bathroom. This is where the children can soak in the tub, "pretending that they [are] in a swimming pool" (Melissa). "The bathtub in my granny's house is where I bath when I go there and I can play with the water", Kátia says (See image). "It stays in her room and my sister and I play at being mermaids", the girl



explains. When the bath tub or the shower-box are not being used for bathing, they can also be turned into secret hiding places for the children. Carol hides behind the shower curtain when she is playing with her grandmother (See photo below): “I do this. I call my aunt and she says, *‘Mother, come and get Carol out of the shower!’* Because that shower can give you an electric shock. So, I go there, get out of the bathroom, get dressed, hide in some other place and she goes to the bathroom and can’t find me”.



Fig. 185: Bath tub in Kátia’s maternal grandparents’ house, where she plays with her sister.

However, the bathroom is far from being the children’s favorite place to play. When they hide somewhere in the house, it is often because they don’t want to take a shower or wash their teeth: “Adults don’t understand. We don’t like taking a shower! It’s really boring!” Fernanda explains. “You just stand there rubbing your body!” (Fernando). Bath time appears to be a waste of time, given all the opportunities there are to play: “I don’t like taking a shower, because it’s in the afternoon, and it takes a long time, and we miss all the TV programs”, José explains. “I don’t like taking a shower. In fact, I never want to take one. The hardest thing... for me is that it’s a waste of time! It’s hell!” says Lion. It is the same for Gabriella, who doesn’t understand why she has to take a shower every day doesn’t even think that she needs one: “When I don’t want to take a shower, I hide. Sometimes, I’m not even dirty and my granny wants to put me under the shower. *‘Take a shower, sweetheart!’* And I say, *‘But granny! I’m not even dirty!’*”. Gabriella



Fig. 186: Carol’s hiding place at her maternal grandmother’s.



also has a companion in her hide-away, her dog, who doesn't like taking a bath either. "When she has to take a bath too and doesn't like it, I call her to come and hide with me. I say: '*Ana, come here!*', and we hide". For Leonardo, brushing his teeth is even worse: "I don't like brushing my teeth because we're always having to do it, so I hide so I don't have to".

While Leonardo hides to avoid it, Érica chooses the bathroom sink as one of her

favorite places: "I love brushing my teeth. That's why I took this photo [Fig.187]. The Pink toothbrush is mine and the blue one is my brother's", the girl explains. Melissa also took a photo of the sink (Fig. 188): "Can you see all the tubes of toothpaste I have? [on the sink, on the left]. I drew a little face on each one. I think I have about ten tubes

of toothpaste, because I Love playing with them. I pretend they are my bathroom Barbies". In Érica's and Melissa's photos we can see how the grandparents' homes change their appearance when grandchildren arrive: "Our toothbrushes are always there at granny's", Érica says; "Everything in this bathroom is mine. This *is my bathroom* at my granny's house", Melissa adds.

According to Attias-Donfut and Segalen (1998), the extent to which grandparents' are

involved in their role as grandparents can also be seen from the way domestic space is re-organized, as happens both in cases of cohabitation – when the grandparents receive their grandchildren into their homes and need to adapt the household to them – and in cases



Fig. 187: Bathroom in Érica's maternal grandparents' house. We can see her and her brother's toothbrushes.

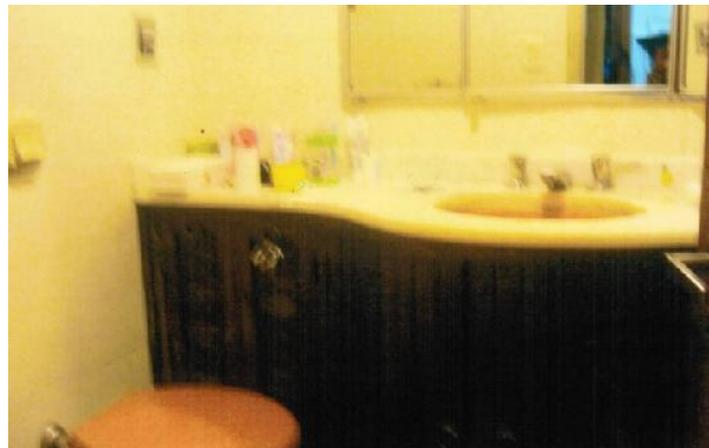


Fig. 188: Bathroom in Melissa's paternal grandparents' house. This bathroom is for her alone and only contains her things.



where the grandchildren are visitors. The more time they spend together, the greater the likelihood that the children will keep objects, toys and clothes at their grandparents'. The bedroom is one of the places that most strongly bears the mark of a child's presence: sometimes they take over a drawer, a shoe-box or a shelf; sometimes the grandparents' own children's bedrooms are redecorated to receive the grandchildren or a bedroom is made especially for them in a new house, as we shall see when we open the door to this room.

### *The Grandchildren's Bedroom*

André does not actually live with his maternal grandparents, but it looks like he does. In their house, where he spends every morning before going to school, André has everything – or even more – that would be there were it his own home: “At my grandparents, my sister and I have a room with a computer, my *Playstation* and an LCD TV”. His grandparents have made a room up especially for



Fig. 190: André's wardrobe at his maternal grandparents' house. He lives in a reconstituted family.

them. Each has their own bed, as we can see in the image below, and they share the same

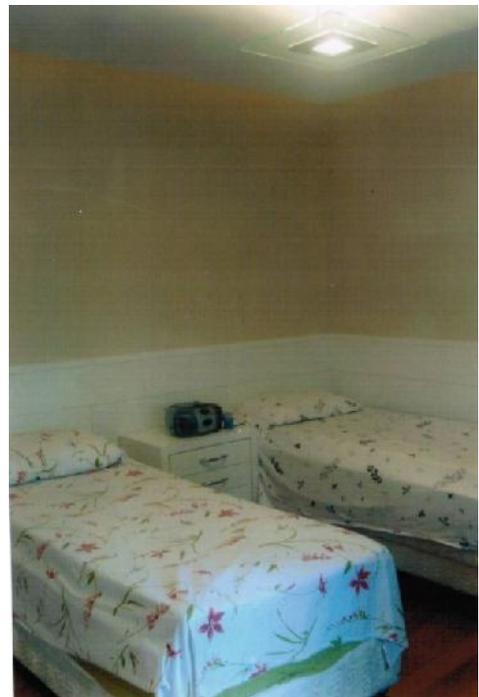


Fig. 189: Bedroom for André and his sister at their grandparents'

wardrobe. Inside the wardrobe, André and his sister have clothes for all seasons: “Here on this shelf [3<sup>rd</sup>] are my school clothes and other clothes. Here are long pants and short-sleeved shirts [4<sup>th</sup> shelf]. At the top are our woolens and winter coats. At the bottom, our sneakers, slippers, that sort of thing”. If we compare André's wardrobe with Luck's, who lives with his maternal grandparents, there are few differences.



Fig. 191: Luck's wardrobe. He lives with parents and grandparents.

Adriana also has a room of her own at her paternal grandparents' house: "I have my own room there, it's *the grandchildren's room*, that I share with my cousin". Her grandmother made the pink lamp-shade by hand. On the TV stand, we can see books, toys and some photos, showing who the room belongs to: Adriana and her cousin at different points in their childhood.



Fig. 192: Adriana and her cousin's bedroom at her paternal grandparents' house

And just as André and Luck's wardrobes aren't that different from one another, so Adriana, who lives in a nuclear family, has a bedroom that is not much different from Fernanda's or Jaqueline's, who live with their grandparents: a bed, a TV, a bedside lamp, pictures and toys are found in all these children's bedrooms. The grandparents' house is often transformed to receive the grandchildren to the point that it appears that they live under the same roof. This means that the children do not suffer when they move from their



parents' house, full of games, books and toys, to their grandparents' (Attias-Donfut & Segalen, 1998).



Fig. 193: On the left, Jaqueline's bedroom; on the right, Fernanda's. Both are similar to Adriana's bedroom, shown in the two photos above.

When grandchildren live with their grandparents, these rooms are often shared with their parents, as a way of adapting the space for three cohabiting generations. It is like this

for Fernanda, Natasha and Carol: "My mother and I sleep in this room [photo shown above on the right] and my granny sleeps in another room", Fernanda explains. Carol, who spends half the week with her father and the other half with her maternal grandmother and her mother, also shares a room (Fig. 194): "This is my bed. At the side you can see another bed. It's a shared room. I share it with my mother and my granny sleeps in her own room". At times, the children may have their own room. In this case, the room may be adapted for them. Luck explains how this may be: "This is my room [See photo below]. Here's where I keep my toys and a



Fig. 194: Room Carol shares with her mother when she lives with her grandmother.

bunch of other stuff! In fact, *it used to be my uncle's room before I was born*. But, as I will explain, he no longer lives here, so I got the room. Except that, at midday, when he comes to have lunch here, he has a nap here while I do something else" (Luck).



Fig. 195: Luck's uncle's room, which he took over after his uncle moved out.

When children leave the parental home, their room may be transformed into a room for the new generation. While, on the one hand, Luck inherited his uncle's room, Melissa inherited her father's. Her grandparents organized a space there for their only granddaughter: "This is *my room*", the girl announces. As we can see from her photograph, Melissa not only got the room, she has left her own stamp on it.



Fig. 196: Melissa's room in her paternal grandparents' house. In the background, the wardrobe where she keeps her clothes. On the wall, the writings that tell the story of her life.

Melissa – There's lots of stuff written on the wall. It started like this... my father lives in France. So I missed him a lot and I started writing on the wall '*Daddy, I love you*'. Then, whenever a friend of mine came round, they thought it really cool and started to scribble things, put stickers, leave notes for me, draw crazy things and what not... So the wall kept changing...



Her grandparents' house, which she calls her own, also has a wardrobe for her clothes and toys: "I keep my clothes here in the wardrobe. It is all here at my granny's. My mother said, *'Let's take it to our place; you've got nothing there! It looks like you live at your granny's!'* And I replied, *'Oh Mummy, but I use it a lot here!'* And she said, *'But this is isn't your home! Your home is with me'*", Melissa recounts. Even when the children do not have their own room at their grandparents', there is always a place waiting for them: "The rooms



Fig. 197: The sofa-bed Kátia sleeps on when she goes to her maternal grandmother's: "This is my aunt's room and this is the bed I sleep on when I go there. When my aunt is also sleeping, we open it out and I sleep underneath".



Fig. 198: Sofa on which Daniele sleeps when he goes to his maternal grandmother's house: "This is where I sleep. There's a thing here that opens and there's a bed inside. It's underneath, not on top".



Fig. 199: The mattress Adriana sleeps on when she goes to her maternal grandmother's house: "This is where I sleep. We lay down a mattress and I sleep on it".



Fig. 200: Sofa-bed Érica sleeps on when she goes to her grandmother's house: "This is where I sleep. It's a sofa-bed. It's in the living room. When I go there, we open it out. It's in the TV room".

are normally organized in such a way as to make room for the grandchildren, in case they come to stay the night or spend some time there. This space, which is not specifically designed for this purpose, is transformed when the grandchildren arrive" (Lins de Barros,



1987, p.23). The sofa-bed is pulled out, the mattress comes out from behind the wardrobe, the double bed is finally put to use. Things are rearranged, as the children themselves show in their photographs and explanations.

Along with the spaces that are arranged to receive visiting grandchildren, there are places for the things that come with them. Teddy bears, dolls, colored pencils and books inhabit the grandparents' home, forming part of its domestic structure. "I have a *Snoopy* collection [Image 1]. It stays there. Because my *Snoopys* are *sacred*, they can only *live at my granny's*. I don't like to take them to other places, because they can pick up dust and get dirty. So, they live there, in my wardrobe. Some of them have been there since I was three" (Carol). Carol's *Snoopys*, who live at her grandmother's, are "subject-objects": they "have, like us, through us and for us, a certain intimacy" (Bachelard, 2008, p.91).

Adriana also has a drawer of things in the wardrobe at her paternal grandparents' house (Image 2): "There are pens for coloring, some decorations that I make and sell around the apartments, a book and a game that I got from the tooth fairy. I leave these things there, so that when I want to play I have my toys". In Érica's grandparents' house, there is also a wardrobe. Inside there are scores of toys for her to play with (Image 3). "I got this bunny, for example, from my granny for Easter", she says. Alice also leaves



Fig. 201: From top to bottom: toys belonging to Carol, Adriana, Érica and Gabriella.



at her grandmother's house "two boxes full of things and all the cuddly toys". Gabriella keeps everything in a cardboard box (Image 4): "This is where I keep my toys at my granny's house. It is a bit of a mess... There's a piece of a doll's house and a file with some pages in it to draw on. Some doll's clothes, a brush and a Father Christmas hat. And here is my cousin's toy laptop. He keeps it in this box too. When my cousin goes there, he keeps his stuff there too".

Gabriella's words reveal something interesting: the toys in the box are not hers alone, but also those of another grandchild, a cousin who visits her grandmother's house. The toys are kept there and the children share them. The grandparents also add to them: they buy books, toys and dolls. "At my borrowed granny's, I sometimes play with a big Lego set they have there. She has two real grandchildren who play with it as well. Alexandra is a year younger than me and Angelie is two years younger than her. *This Lego used to belong to their cousins, who gave it to them, and I play with it too!*", Luca recounts. Érica also plays with toys that she finds at her maternal grandparents' house (Images 1 and 2): "There's lots of toys at my grandparents' house. These stay at their place. *They're my granny's, some belong to my cousins and some are mine.* There's a ramp that leads up to a bag full of toys too... And my granny also has lots of books, which I read when I go there. She bought them for us to read, because we like to read", Érica explains. Nanda, borrows toys from



Fig. 202: From top to bottom: Érica's toys (photos 1 and 2) and Nanda's.

her cousin (Image 3): "These are instruments that *my cousin got for Christmas.* When I go to



visit my granny, I see my cousin, and we play them on top of my granny's bed". As we can see, "it is not only the grandparents who are totally devoted to their grandchildren: there are no limits throughout the house" (Lins de Barros, 1987, p. 125), which is readapted to having children around. This shows great willingness on the part of the older generation to, literally, invest in having contact and spending time with the youngest generation.

### *The Grandparents' Bedroom*

It's the bed the grandparents sleep in that the children really like "to throw [themselves] onto and jump about on" (Melissa) as soon as they arrive. The bed is not just a place to sleep, but a place to play and build up a relationship with the grandparents. "The things I most like doing with my granny, I do here, in her room", Fernando explains. It was on this old bed with a blue quilt that he had been playing with his grandmother the day before: "At night, before going to sleep, I imagine things to help me sleep, but yesterday I couldn't, so I thought of doing a puppet show. Then, the next day, when I woke



Fig. 203: Fernando's maternal grandmother's room, where he does cool things.

up, I went to her room and we did it together, we did a puppet show together on top of the bed". Melissa also recalls games she has played in her paternal grandparents' bedroom: "My granny says that one day I'll break the springs in the mattress, I jump up and down on it so much. But I've been doing that since I was seven, six, five, four, three years old! I love it when we do this: she sits down, I throw myself at her, she falls back and we lie there on top of one another".

Gabriella also likes the springs that make the bed like a trampoline: "The bed has springs. So when we go there, we jump up and down on it!", she says. Even at bedtime, granny's bed can be fun: "It's fun to sleep there, at night. The dog comes to sleep with us,



under the blankets, nice and cozy. Look I took a close-up photo to show how comfortable it is! Then granny comes to bed and the three of us watch TV before going to sleep”.

For Natasha, her grandmother’s bedroom “is one of the most important places in the house”; she explains: “I like to be there. I sew with her; we talk and



Fig. 204: Gabriella’s maternal grandmother’s bedroom: a place where she likes to jump on the bed, sleep, and watch TV.

watch TV together, lying on the bed”. The drawing below shows that one of the best memories that Natasha has of her maternal grandmother are of being in her room: “Once, my mum had to go to São Paulo, so I stayed at granny’s. It was great! *I stayed in my granny’s room watching cartoons until late*”.



Fig. 205: Natasha’s maternal grandmother’s room where they sew and watch TV.



Fig. 206: “A really good memory”: the girl and her grandmother watching cartoons in bed.

Leonardo also likes to lie down on his grandmother’s bed watching TV (See photograph below): “This is my grandmother’s room. She has left the TV on... I like to lie there watching the soap opera and also the news. We lie here watching TV, my sister and I. Sometimes our granny joins us”. It was through his grandmother that he started liking the news: “Before, I didn’t like watching the news, but now I do. My granny turns on the TV and



asks me to join her”, the boy explains. Watching TV until late is one of the great attractions of the grandparents’ house. “There we can watch TV until late!”, Nycolle exclaims. And when the children have brothers and sisters, this is a truly communal moment: “My granny lies down in the middle and we lie on the sides. That way we don’t fight”, the girl adds. When



Fig. 207: Leonardo’s maternal grandmother’s bedroom where they watch the soap operas and the news.

sleeping with their grandmothers, the only thing that the children complain about are the noises: “The bad thing is that when I wake up in the middle of the night, I can’t get back to sleep, because she snores” (Lion), “she snores all night long” (Gabriella), “I can hear her snoring” (José).

However, although the children have fun and enjoy the things they discover at their grandparents’ house, sleeping there isn’t necessarily easy for them: sometimes it’s the snoring, sometimes, they miss their parents. Érica says that whenever she sleeps at her grandmother’s she wakes up “with her heart beating fast”: “when I sleep in one of my grandparents’ houses, I sometimes think that I am at home. And I wake up with a start, because I think I am at home, but I’m not”. Nanda says that she can’t sleep alone at her grandparents’, because she suffers “from insomnia”: “This happens when I’m not with my parents. Once, I tried to sleep, but I couldn’t... I start crying, screaming, wailing, and wake up the neighbors... Once my grandpa had to ring up my father to come and fetch me in the middle of the night”.

Over time, many children learn to overcome these difficulties and staying alone with their grandparents becomes something fun: “I remember the first time I stayed alone with my grandparents’. We were at the seaside; at first it was hard, but I got used to it”, Yasmin recounts. Daniele proudly remembers the first time he managed to spend a long time away from his parents: “Once I slept over at my granny’s seaside house and I had to spend a week away from my parents, and I couldn’t do it! But my granny took me to the beach, I went to



the square, I visited a friend of hers and met her daughter, and then it got easier. I didn't think about my parents so much".

In the grandparents' bedroom, there is also a whole world of clothes and glass bottles and flasks. Catarina is enchanted by the flasks:



Fig. 208: Perfume and hand-cream bottles drawn by Catarina.

Catarina – There in my grandmother's place, my cousin, and I play with the things in her room. She has loads of lipstick! We use the lipstick, make ourselves up, wear perfume and rub in cream. Once we were messing about with her talcum powder and it blew about all over the room. And when we heard her coming, we hid under the bed. We love to play with our grandmother's make-up.

André also likes to play with the bottles and flasks: "Yesterday, after taking a shower, I put on something of my granny's and it smelt wonderful!" he says. Other children remember the smell of the

perfumes and creams used by their grandparents: "My granny smells lovely!", Catarina exclaims. She draws herself remembering her grandmother's perfume. It is the same for Natasha. "I love the smell of my granny's perfume! I love it when she puts her perfume on me! It's Carolina Herrera!" she reveals, even knowing the name of the brand.



Fig. 209: Catarina remembering her grandmother's perfume. "My granny smells lovely!" (Catarina).

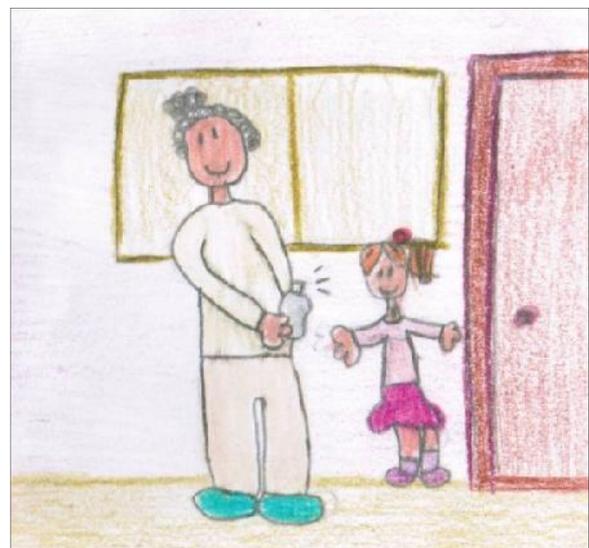


Fig. 210: Natasha with her grandmother's perfume bottle: "I love it when she puts hr perfume on me!" (Natasha).

While Catarina, Natasha and André like the perfume bottles, Adriana likes the wardrobe: "My cousin and I, when we're playing, cram into my granny's wardrobe. We hide ourselves in the things



she keeps there: she stays in one corner and me in the other. We close the door and stay there in the dark". As Bachelard (2008) notes, "every poet knows that the inside of an old wardrobe is deep. The inside of a wardrobe is an *intimate space*, a space that is not open to anyone" (p.91, italics added). This is why children are always allowed to discover what their grandparents keep there.



Fig. 211: Adriana's maternal grandmother's wardrobe: where she and her cousin hide.

### *The Nooks and Crannies*

Adriana, describing her grandmother's wardrobe as a secret hiding place, says that she and her cousin hide in its nooks and crannies. Hide and seek, one of the most traditional children's games – as possibly portrayed by the German painter Friedrich Eduard Meyerheim (1808-1879) in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (See image below) – is still played in their grandparents' homes. The game doesn't necessarily have any rules: the children don't invite their grandparents to play it, but when they hide, they encourage them to try to find them. "You're getting warm! You're cold! Where are you? Where are you?", Chico Buarque sings in the children's musical, *Os Saltimbancos* (1977). If the object of the game is not be easily found, there is nothing better than the nooks and crannies of the house, which the children can "squeeze into" (Adriana), "squashed in there" (José) between one piece of furniture and another. "Do we not find in our own homes, nooks and crannies that we like to squeeze into? [...] Squeezing in is part of the phenomenology of inhabiting. We only intensively inhabit places we can squeeze into", Bachelard says (2008, p.21).



Fig. 212: Meyerheim, Friedrich Eduard (1808-1879). *Versteckspiel im Wald* (Hide-and-seek in the woods). Oil on metal. 17cm x 20 cm.



There is no nook or cranny in the grandparents' house that the grandchildren don't know about. These places, which are often overlooked by adults, spring to life in the secret world of the children. Sometimes it is a very narrow cramped space: "This is my hiding place [Fig. 213] Here, *in the corner*. I go in there and take my granny's blankets and put one here and one here. And I stay there, *tightly squeezed in*" (Gabriella). Adriana's favorite hiding place at her paternal grandparents' is behind the bathroom door (Fig. 214): "This is the bedroom and this is the bathroom door. The bathroom's through there.



Fig. 213: Gabriella's hiding place: the corner next to her grandmother's bed.



Fig. 215: Luck's hiding place: under the desk.

When I hide, I shut the door and stay inside, I pull the door to and I'm well hidden". Luck hides under his grandfather's desk (Fig. 215), while

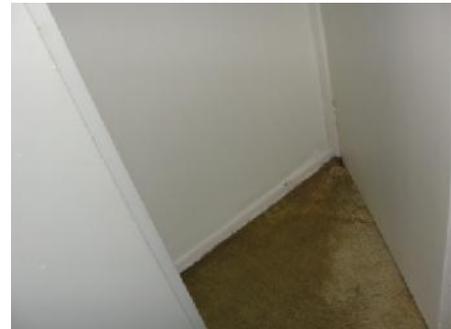


Fig. 214: Adriana's hiding place: a triangular corner behind the bathroom door.



Fig. 216: Natasha's hiding place inside the sewing machine.

Natasha shuts herself up in her hiding place, like a snail in its shell (Fig. 216): "This is my granny's sewing machine. I don't know how to use it, but I took a photo because this is my hiding place. I close the doors on me and stay there very quiet".

But why do children hide? We have already seen that they hide because they don't want to take a shower or brush their teeth. But this is not the only reason.

Children hide when they do not want to "do their homework" (Adriana), "take a bad-tasting medicine" (Natasha) or "eat vegetables" (José). It can also be a game: "I hide when I want to play hide and seek (Fernando), "when I want to give someone a fright" (Fernanda) or "just for fun, just to pull my granny's leg" (Luca). Sometimes, they hide because they want to be found soon, as when they want to give someone a fright or are playing hide and seek. "I hide



and I call out to my granny saying, *'Granny, come here!'* Then I quickly hide and she tries to find me" (Adriana); sometimes they hide because they are sure they will not be found: "When I don't want to leave my granny's, I hide so my mum can't find me", Érica says. "When I don't want anyone to find me, I go there, stay there, and no-one knows where I am", José says.

Sometimes the hiding place can be outside. Daniele, for example, says that she hides "behind the concrete pillar in the gym" in her grandparents' condominium, as shown in the photograph reproduced here. When they go out, the house surroundings are another world of games and new discoveries.



Fig. 217: Daniele's hiding place: concrete pillar, bottom left.

### *The Surroundings*

When the grandparents live in apartments, the outside space can be quite restricted, since not all apartment blocks have open areas or leisure facilities. However, when the condominium have places to play, many children make use of these areas. When the children can run about outside, the horizons of their imagination are broadened: they can get to know the neighborhood and the outside of the house and, according to Cunha (2008), get involved in its culture, which includes not only what happens in the immediate vicinity, but "all the forms of play and symbols that the life [of a group] provides" (p.77).



Daniele, for example, plays with her brother on the soccer field in the playground area of her grandparents' apartment block (Fig. 218): "We come here to run, my brother skateboards and I watch him". André also plays in the lobby of his grandparents' building (Fig. 219): "This is the porter's lodge. When you go down in the elevator or go down the stairs, you arrive here. This is where we skateboard, play soccer and this blue bench we sometimes use as a skateboard ramp. We pretend that the skateboard is coming and jump up on this blue thing".



Fig. 218: Football field where Daniele plays with her brother at her grandmother's house.



Fig. 219: Lobby of the building where André skateboards.

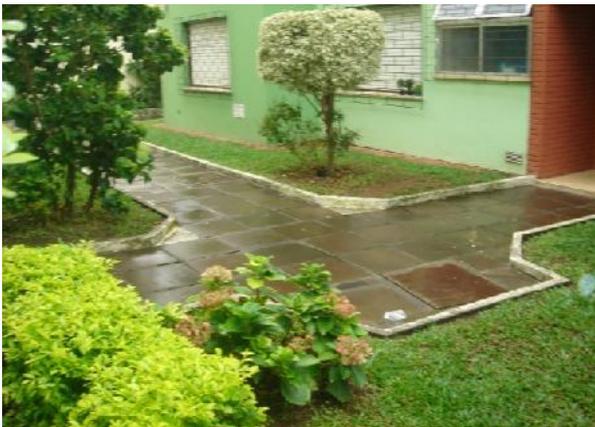


Fig. 220: Garden belonging to the house where Fernanda lives with her maternal grandmother.



Fig. 221: Garden belonging to Nanda's paternal grandmother's house.

The larger the playground area, the more wide-ranging games the children can play. Fernanda, who lives with her mother and her grandmother in an apartment, likes to play "tag, hide-and-see and cops and robbers in the garden" (Fig. 220): "We play any game we can. This is in front of our apartment. There's a staircase and a ramp and here there's another gate". Nanda shows us the small garden in front of the building where her grandmother lives and says (Fig. 221): "I play in this little garden



with my cousin and we get lost in the Forest and I like to come here to *look for snails to see what they do*".

Kátia also likes to observe nature (Fig. 222): "I love the fountain at my granny's house. We tried to take a photo of a bird, but weren't able to. This fountain is on the patio. I like to *come here to look at the birds*. They hear the noise of the falling water and come". Nanda and Kátia have something in common. Both like to go out into the garden to observe nature, the twittering of the birds or the tiny life of mollusks. According to Dolto (1999b), children's interest in nature begins in very early infancy, when they are enchanted by the vibrant colors of flowers, by the rustling of the leaves in the wind and the comings and goings of ants. This is why Érica took a photo of a lilac tree at her grandparents' house (Fig. 223): "I think it is *so pretty*... Just look at the color! I like to sit here *looking at it*. I also like to pick up the flowers that fall to the ground and put them back in the tree".



Fig. 222: Indoor garden at Kátia's grandparents' house.



Fig. 223: Garden at Érica's maternal grandparents' house, where she likes to observe nature

Alice says that her favorite place in her maternal grandmother's house is the balcony, "which is *open, there are plants* and you can see the whole plot. As *it is full of plants*, I love to *go there!*". It is on the plot of land between the two houses, that she has fun growing things with her grandmother: "I always liked growing things, I've always loved plants, ever since I was little, but I prefer growing flowers to smelling them, because I get hay fever and they make me sneeze, but *I love growing them!*". Alice also has her own garden: "I grow spring onions all year round; I've grown cloves, carrots and now I'm growing rosemary!". Her grandmother is an important figure in this: "She brings me the earth and the seeds and I have fun and learn at the same time". While Alice tends her own garden, her grandmother



tends hers: “My granny grows beautiful roses in the garden and we put them on show in the house and I take them to my teachers. On my teacher’s birthday, I brought her *a lovely sweet-smelling rose from my grandmother’s garden*”, she says. In her drawing below she shows a flower from the same garden covered in glitter. “Flowers shine”, she explains.



Fig. 224: A sweet-smelling flower from Alice’s grandmother’s garden.



Fig. 225: Photo taken from the balcony of her grandmother’s house, in which Alice shows the garden where she enjoys growing things.

Contact with nature is an important opportunity for the children to interact, not only with the earth, water and plants, but also with their grandparents. The older generation’s interest in nature has been demonstrated by the *Elderly in Brazil* survey. According to this study, tending to plants was the third most common activity (out of a total of ten) carried out by elderly people in their own homes (63%), topped only by watching television (93%) and listening to the radio (80%) (Doll, 2007). This therefore would seem to be a leisure activities that brings grandparents and grandchildren together.

On Kátia’s maternal grandfather’s farm, for example, she “waters the plants in the garden, feeds the dogs and looks after the animals”. Adriana likes to “potter around in grandfather’s orchid collection”, while Pedro likes to “change the earth and water the plants”: “When you see that the earth is looking a bit bad, you have to repot the plant”, he explains. “My granny’s house has four gardens: one at the front, another at the side, and two on top. She shows me which plants are poisonous and teaches me all their names. It’s great fun!” the boy exclaims. In the drawings below, we can see the children engaging in such activities.



Fig. 226: Kátia tending her grandfather's garden.



Fig. 227: Adriana's grandfather's orchid collection.

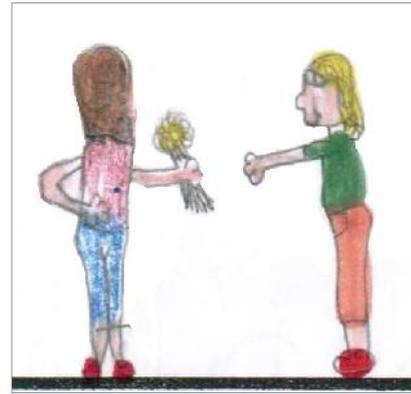


Fig. 228: Mariana\* pruning with her grandmother.

However, the surroundings of the house are not fun only because the children can grow plants with their grandparents. Nature also provides opportunities for play: climbing trees, running on the lawn, playing with animals. The surroundings of the house contain a world full of entertainment and an extension of the inside. Amanda, for example, brought a photo of herself when she was little in the orange tree at her grandparents'.



Amanda – My grandparents have now moved to an apartment, but this was the place I liked most at their house. I remember... I loved messing around here, climbing the trees in the garden. I was three when these photos were taken and I was frightened of doing this. But I remember. This was the place I most liked in their house.



Fig. 229: Amanda playing in the orange tree at her maternal grandparents' house.

It is not only the inside of the house that is changed to receive the grandchildren. The outdoor parts can also be adapted to the children's need for playthings. In the house where Leonardo lives with his grandmother, for example, a small playground was constructed, with



a slide, a swing, and a see-saw for him and his sister to play outdoors, under the shade of the trees.



Fig. 230: The playground that Leonardo and his sister got as a present on Children's Day.

Érica also tells that her paternal grandfather, who lives on a farm, built a “tree-house” for her to play in. “We play at being monkeys, we play house, loads of things!” the girl explains. “We climb up here on this thing (1), and this branch is my bed (2). This other tree over there only my uncle (who is twelve) can climb (3). So we play at being monkeys... this is our house and we swing from the branches”. When they are on the ground, they play Uga-Uga: “My uncle is Uga-uga and he has to catch us, and we run and try and hide from



Fig. 231: Érica's “tree-house” on her grandparents' farm.



him. If he catches us we become like him and have to say Uga-Uga-Uga". Érica's descriptions echo Benjamin's words (1984), when he notes that "children want to take anything and transform it into a horse, they want to play with sand and become a builder, they want to hide and become a robber or a cop" (p.76), climb a tree and become a monkey, run through the green leaves and become a little Indian. Children are creative and imaginative; they take things from the world around them and transform them. As Dornelles (2001) puts it, "play is something that belongs to children, to childhood. Through play, children experiment with organizing themselves, controlling themselves, establishing norms for themselves and for others. With each game, they recreate the world around them" (p.104).

Apart from playing with plants, children also like to play with animals. Indoors as well as out, they interact with dogs and cats and other animals that live with them and their grandparents. In the course of this study, they frequently appeared as important figures. In the family drawing, for example, some animals were portrayed by the children as family members, as has been found by other researchers (Gils, 1997; Müller, 2010; Silva, Melo & Appolinário, 2007). Animals are also present in their games and in their telephone conversations. Many children not only interact with them when they are at their grandparents' house, but also ask after them as this dialogue with Nycolle illustrates:

Researcher – What do you do when you go to Minas? [her paternal grandmother's house]

Nycolle – When I go to Minas *I play with Sandy*. Sandy is her dog.

Researcher – And do the two of you [her and her grandmother] talk over the phone or through Orkut?

Nycolle – Yes. I ask if she is missing me and I say that I am missing her lots. On Orkut my father says that I am missing her a lot *and I add that I am missing Sandy a lot too*.

According to Melson (2001), animals play an important role in the social relations of children:

Like parents or grandparents, children's pets can give them feelings of being loved, reassure them in times of stress, counteract loneliness, and provide emotional support. Like siblings, animals can be at-home play companions, or afterschool company in an empty house. Like friends, pets can be confidants, keepers of secrets, and members in good standing (p.16).

Thus, in the games that they play at their grandparents', the animals appear as their companions.

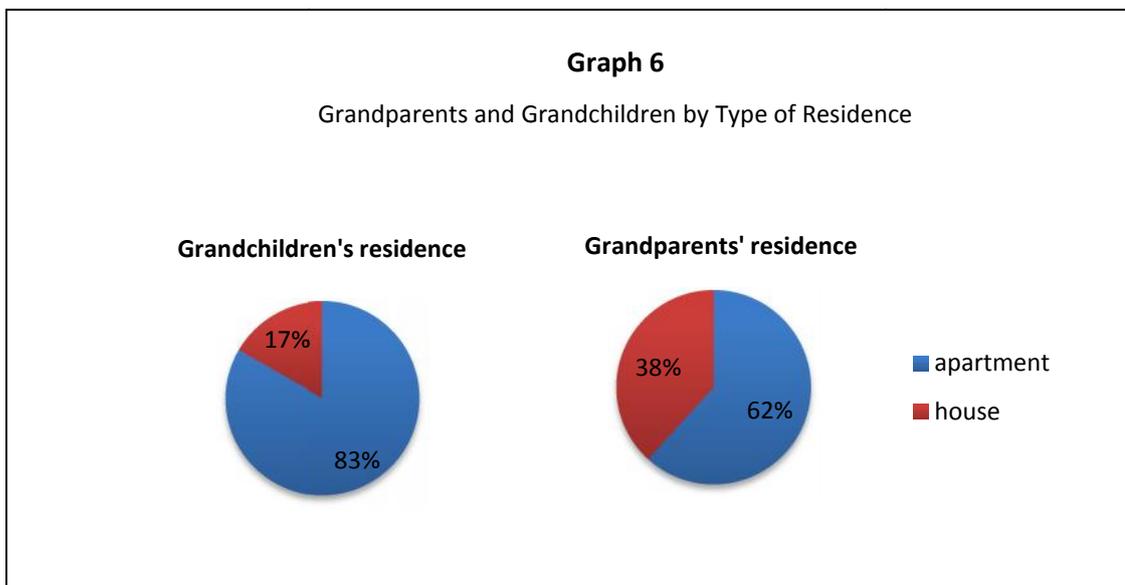


Fig. 232: From left to right: details from photos taken by Jaqueline, José, Érica and Carol.

Gardens, trees and animals are most frequently mentioned by children whose grandparents live in a house (38% of households). As 83% of the children live in apartments, the outdoor part of their grandparents' house is, for many of them, an important place for coming into contact with the natural world.<sup>57</sup>

José – *As I live in an apartment, there's no yard for me to play in... There's almost nothing to do. Just my toys.*

Adriana – *I stay on the computer, as it's an apartment, and there's nothing to do.*



<sup>57</sup> Clearly the grandparents' houses may not have a yard or plants, but this was not the case with the children included in this study.



#### 4.2.4 Family Meetings: the grandparents' house as a meeting place

Hanging on the walls or on display on top of the furniture, grandparents' houses usually keep photographs of previous generations. There are the great-grandparents, grandparents, children and grandchildren, captured in a fragment of time and fixed in an image of this "thin object that you can keep and go back to look at" whenever you want, named 'photograph' (Sontag, 2008, p.27). Photographs allow a family to build up "a chronological portrait of itself, and portable set of images that bears witness to the strength of their ties" (Sontag, 2008, p.18). These register births, birthdays, wedding receptions and the everyday life of its members, immortalized in this "image-object" (Kim, 2003, p.228) that is a photo: "Here on the shelves are photos of our family. That really big photo there is of me as a baby, in a little chair that I used to love. This is me, my sister, my parents..." Alice explains as she shows us the photographs in her maternal grandmother's living room.



Fig. 233: Family photographs on shelves in Alice's grandmother's living room.

Photographs of the grandchildren can also be found in Catarina's maternal grandmother's living room (Photo on the left) and in Diego's paternal grandparents' family gallery (Photo on the right). "This is where my granny hangs our photographs and the drawings I do.... There are lots of photos of me, *when I was still a baby*", he explains. By looking at these images, the children can perceive the passage of time, how people were and how they are now. As Sontag (2008) puts it, "to take a photograph is to partake of the mortality, vulnerability, and mutability of the other person or thing", it is to attest to "the pitiless dissolution of time" (p. 25).



Fig. 234: Family photographs on the wall in Catarina's grandmother's house and in Diego's grandparents' photo galleries de Diego.

Baiano's words aptly illustrate this, as do Alexandra's descriptions of a time she spent with her grandparents.

Baiano – I was looking at my photo album last night, at my granny's, and this is a very happy memory for me! I saw lots of photos!

Researcher – What was good about it?

Baiano – Because this album has *photos of when I was little, of when I'd grown up a bit, and of when I'd grown up a bit more...* There are also photos of my uncle's birthday, my granny's and my father's, who is separated from my mum, *but I still have photos from when they were still together.* Photos of my whole family!



Fig. 235: Photo of Alexandra at her maternal grandparents' old house.

Alexandra [on the photograph above] – This was a dinner party at my grandparents' house. This [on the left, in a blue jacket] is my cousin's mother, then my cousin, who is 25, *but at that time he was about 15*, and this is Nando [in a White shirt], who is now 17, *but at the time was 10*, my Granny Nice, *who was 64*,



*but now is 71, and the baby on her lap is me when I was two years old and this here is my grandfather, who was 68, or something. We were at my grandfather's old house... they've changed it all now. They've changed the sofa and the curtains... It was a family dinner!*

As Alexandra reports, these photographs often register times spent at the grandparents' house, a place where families get together "to have a barbecue" (Lucas), "to play cards" (Alex), "to see in the New Year" (Lion) or "to spend Christmas" (Betina). Parties are almost always held in the homes of the oldest generation, and these are times when uncles and aunts, parents and cousins meet one another. As Certeau et al. (1996) put it, the house is also a meeting-place, "families get together to celebrate the rhythms of time, meet new generations, welcome a new baby, celebrate marriages, overcome trials and tribulations, everything that makes up the long task of happiness and struggle that can only be done 'at home'." (p.206). It is at family get-togethers that new spaces are developed for learning about oneself and others. At these, we learn how to deal with society in that which is most beautiful and captivating about it, which is the human experience of respect, hospitality, liberty, familiarity and intersubjectivity (Cunha, 2008). The words of the children demonstrate the importance of these times spent together:

Betina – Christmas and New Year *are always at my grandparents'*. They have a *chateau*, which is where we do Secret Santa *and have meals on special days*.

Lion – New Year! I like it a lot because *all the family is together at my granny's!*

Gabriella – New Year, Christmas and Easter are always at my granny's or my aunt's!

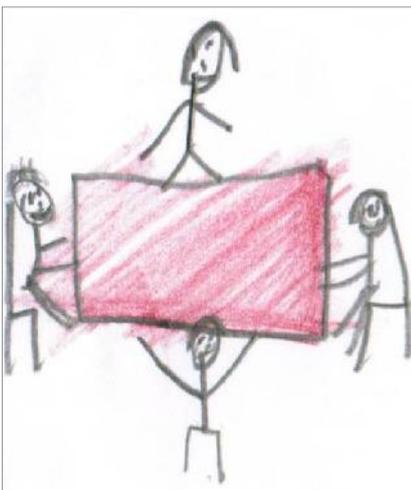


Fig. 236: Alex's drawing: family get-together for his brother's first communion.



Fig. 237: Élis's\* drawing: Christmas with his grandmothers.

When there's a birthday party, it's usually really cool! I remember my brother's first



communion! It was on 24 April. After we had a party. My cousin came, her boyfriend, my uncle, my uncle's girlfriend, my aunt, another uncle, us... It was at my granny's house, which has a room for special events.

Natasha – My granny cooks turkey every Christmas Eve.

Diego – As my parents are separated, I spend Christmas either with Granny Pedra or with Granny Irene, one Christmas with each. When I spend it with my mother, I see one granny, and when I spend it with my father, I see the other.

Alex – When my grandfather has a barbecue at his place, that's really good! On Saturday it's chicken and on Sunday, barbecue!

This is why Lucas took a photo of the barbecue at his paternal grandmother's house: "This is where the family gets together for New Year. We stay there, watching the fireworks. And my uncle puts on a barbecue and my father helps. There's a huge



Fig. 238: Élis's\* Drawing: Family Barbecue.

room for events that we use for Christmas, New Year and Easter". In his drawing, he also remembers this moment as one of the Best he has had at his grandmother's house: "I love it when we get together and have a barbecue", he says.

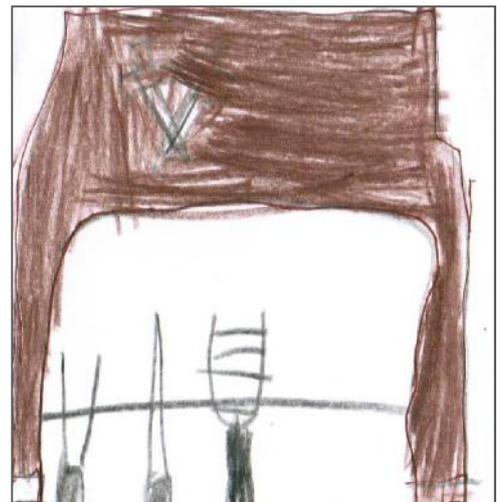


Fig. 239: Photo and drawing of the barbecue with spits at Lucas's paternal grandmother's house.



The weekend barbecue is a strong tradition among people from Rio Grande do Sul and Alice also remembers these, taking a photo of the part of her grandmother's house where the barbecue is (in the background on the right): "This is where I like to be! *It is where everybody gets together!* This is my father's barbecue, where he barbecues the meat and I make the vinaigrette. *Everyone gathers there! Everyone.* Like, *Christmas Eve dinner is always there!*... When I am here, I play in my brown arm-chair, I am with my family and watch TV". For people from Rio Grande do Sul, the barbecue is often accompanied by a round of *chimarrão* tea, which also introduces the children to family and regional customs: "I learnt to drink *chimarrão* with my granny. It's great. Everyone together drinking it. It's delicious! On Sundays, you sit here, watch the sunset, talk and drink *chimarrão*", Luca says.



Fig. 240: Photograph of Alice's grandmother's house, where the family gathers for a barbecue.



Fig. 241: Luca learning to drink *chimarrão* with his family.

### *At get-togethers there are presents*

As most of these family get-togethers take place on festive occasions, they are often also accompanied by the exchange of gifts between grandparents and grandchildren, as Betina\* shows, in the drawing below. Her smile when she receives the box indicates how pleased she is to receive it. What has her grandmother brought her wrapped up like this? According to the children, grandparents almost always give them clothes and toys. The latter include – "a *Little Mummy*" (Carol), "a Barbie house" (Érica) or "a little Japanese doll"



(Catarina) –, or more sophisticated toys – such as “a *Star Wars* spaceship with a doll inside” (Lion), “a real light-saber” (André) or “a remote-control car” (José) – and electronic games – such as “*Playstation*” (Alex), “*Nintendo Wii*” (Felipe), “*Wii Fit*” (André) or “*X-Box*” (Artur).

These presents are chosen according to the consumer desires of the grandchildren – who are caught up in *kindercultura* (Steinberg, 1997) and drawn by adverts for consumer goods that serve to “inform, persuade, sell to, and satisfy the desires of children” (Capparelli, 1997, p.50) – or in response to things the children themselves have asked for, who tell their grandparents what they would like to get for their birthday or Christmas.



Fig. 242: Betina's\* drawing: a present from her grandmother.

Kátia – For Christmas, *I always give my granny a hint about what I want*, but if she doesn't give me it, that's OK...

Alex – I got a *Nintendo Wii* from my granny in Uruguay. *We asked for it*. And we also got *Play II* from her. *We asked for Nintendo, but not Play II*. She got it for us as a surprise... She arrived one day with a bag, and when I looked inside there was a *Playstation*.

Ashley – Sometimes I ask her for something and sometimes she gives me a present I haven't asked for.



Fig. 243: Lorenzo's\* drawing: “For me, every Christmas is special”. We can see him here, spying from behind the door to see what presents he will get from his relatives, including his grandparents, of course.



Felipe – My granny is really good to me. She buys me everything! *She paid for half of the Wii with my father. She gave me the Victor Hill guitar. I ask her for things, but she knows me pretty well... she knows what I like!*

Natasha – I don't ask for things much. Usually it's her who gives me things. Sometimes, when she is making clothes on the sewing machine I sit watching and I talk to her and she gives me it. She makes clothes for me too.

Alexandra – My granny is always asking me, 'What do you want?' And I say, 'It doesn't matter what you give me, I'll always love it!'

When children receive the presents they have desired for so long, it is an unforgettable moment. Gabriella's most striking memories involve the presents she received from her maternal grandmother, as she herself explains:



Fig. 244: Gabriella's drawing: the Day she woke up in her grandmother's house and there was a present for her on the dinner table.

Gabriella – I have two great memories. The first is the present my granny gave me for Christmas, which was a Polly track; and the second memory is when I slept over at my granny's house. When I woke up it was my birthday and my granny didn't tell me and when I came home for lunch, there was a present in front of my plate: it was a doll that has a button you press to make her talk and some talking dogs. It was Barbie Vet!

It was the same for Diego:



Fig. 245: Diego's Drawing: the Christmas he received a Batmobile from his grandmother.

Diego – My granny gave me a Batmobile when I was three and I still have it today. I asked her for it. When I first got it, it was bigger than me!

However, grandparents do not only give presents on festive occasions. Whenever they see each other, there is the possibility that the children will receive little treats, such as "a games book from the newsagent" (Baiano), "a pom-pom key-ring" (Gabriella), "a lipstick" (Catarina) or "candy, snacks and popcorn" (Kátia).

Few grandparents make presents for their grandchildren, but there are those that paint "pictures" (Érica), "make clothes" (Natasha), "make a quilt" (Joahnn), "knit sweaters" (Daniele), "leggings, jackets and scarves" (Kátia). There are also those that don't give material gifts – "My Granny Helena doesn't give me presents. She only wishes me happy



birthday, because she hasn't got enough money to spend on things like that" (Catarina) –, or whose presents take the form of services – "If my room is really untidy, her present might be to tidy my room. Instead of leaving it for me to do alone with my mum, she tidies up my room for me" (Alexandra).

Money is a common present, and is given on any occasion in varying quantities. Baiano gets money "to buy things to eat" and Alexandre says he gets money for his birthday: "She always gives me R\$100 as a present, *because she doesn't know what to get me*", he says. João also gets money as a present:

"My grandpa gives me R\$ 50 and my granny gives me R\$ 25, because he sees me less. And because he doesn't spend much time with me, *he doesn't know what I like*". It is the same for Adriana: "My granny, when it's my birthday, *doesn't know what to give me*, so she gives me money". Sometimes, when the



Fig. 246: Fernando's\* Drawing: "I love it when my granny gives me money as a present".

grandparents live far away, the present may take the form of a gift voucher, as in the case of Yasmin: "From my grandma, I get a gift voucher for a toy shop. That way, I can choose what I want!" According to Attias-Donfut (2002), the giving of money by grandparents to grandchildren is practically an institution, and represents both a token of thanks and a helping hand.

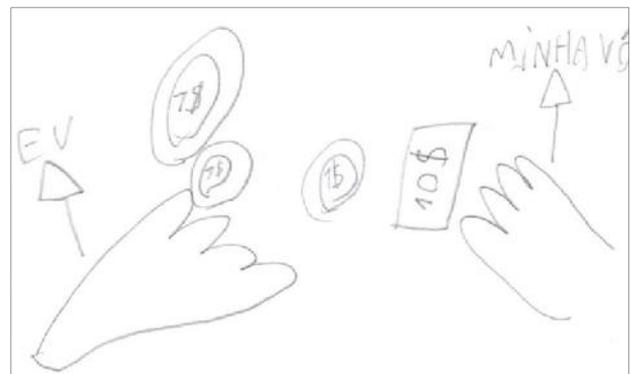


Fig. 247: Thiago's\* drawing: "My grandparents are cool, special and kind. They always give me money".

And, if, on the one hand, it is convenient for the grandparents, because the grandchildren can buy what they want, it is also convenient for the grandchildren, who can save the money up for a special occasion or to buy something that they really want as a present. "He gives me money to spend on what I want", João says. For Attias-Donfut (2002), "money as a present reflects and reinforces the autonomy of the different generations" (p.118), not necessarily signaling emotional distance or lack of intimacy.



The presents the children give are nearly always handmade by themselves. As they have no income, they use their own artistic abilities to make gifts for their grandparents: “I always give them a card or a drawing. I also make jewelry, a bracelet made of little stones”, Kátia says. Yasmin and Diego also make jewelry: “I made her a necklace with a blue butterfly in the middle”, Yasmin says; and “I made a bracelet that my sister taught me how to make”, Diego says. Carol has made a hand-painted “decorative tea-towel” and Alexandre “a paper flower on a rubber stem with a sweet inside”. But the children undoubtedly give their love (as Alice indicates on the packaging of her present) and her precious drawings: “I always give a card that I have made myself and my drawings”, Baiano says. “Do you know those guys who



Fig. 248: Rodrigo's\* drawing: “A special memory was when I gave my granny a drawing I had done.

are really tough?” – asks João – “I can draw them and I draw them for my granny, because she loves it when I draw them!”.

These presents made by the children themselves may serve as decoration, such as the painting that Adriana made in her art class, which now adorns the wall in her grandparents' house (See image below). When the children go home, their drawings function as photographs: souvenirs scattered around the house. This is why André\* always leaves a drawing when he takes leave of his



Fig. 249: What Alice writes she is giving to her grandmother.

grandparents' house. “My grandparents are special and very nice to me. Before I leave, I always make a card with a drawing on it so they don't miss me and my brothers and sisters”, the boy explains.



Fig. 250: Photograph of the painting, based on a Monet, that Adriana produced which now decorates her paternal grandparents' house.

As we saw in Chapter 2, treats and little presents are important factors for children when deciding their preference. “Granny is a person who never forgets us... Like, *she always gives us a bit of money, gives us something, to show that she likes us, she gives us a present to make us happy*”, Luca points out during the ET activity in our first meeting.

### *At get-togethers we meet cousins*

The grandparents' house also provides an important setting for meeting cousins. The children are constantly saying that their cousins are their companions in adventures and games: they play hide-and-seek and planes with them, discover mysterious places together, bathe together, run in the garden, or run away from rams. They are children who create their own territory based on their perception of the world, houses and people. André says that his cousin is “a cool dude”; Baiano, that “he is super-cool”; while Alice describes her cousin “my life and soul, my soul-mate, who does everything with me”. Nanda also has a great companion in her cousin: “I play tag with her or picnics”, she says. Especially for children who do not have brothers and sisters (19 of the 36 children interviewed are only children), the cousins represent the only possibility for intragenerational contact in the



family<sup>58</sup>, and this usually occurs at the grandparents' house. Because these are often best of friends, the children include them as true family members, as we can see in Alice and Nanda's drawings.

For these children, even though brothers are "a pain" (Catarina), and they "fight all the time" (Érica) or "are always annoying" (Leonardo), which sometimes makes "you want to disappear" (Betina), they are "company" (Felipe). "I like my brother a lot. We are *great companions*, because we play lots of things together, we play *Playstation*, play ball, all sorts of things", Alex says. Not having a brother is something "bad" (Daniele) because "there's nothing to do" (Ashley), "you don't have

anyone to play with" (Artur), "you have to do everything alone" (Luck) and "playing alone isn't very nice" (Adriana). When children do not have companions of their own age, they "play on the computer to pass the time" (Adriana), "watch TV, draw" (Felipe), "listen to music" (Yasmin) or "talk with dolls and ghosts" (Nanda): "I play with my imaginary friends", Melissa says. José says that his only companion is his dog: "If I had a brother, we would do



Fig. 251: Drawing of Alice's family, in which we can see her cousin, whereas, she has not drawn, for example, her uncles.

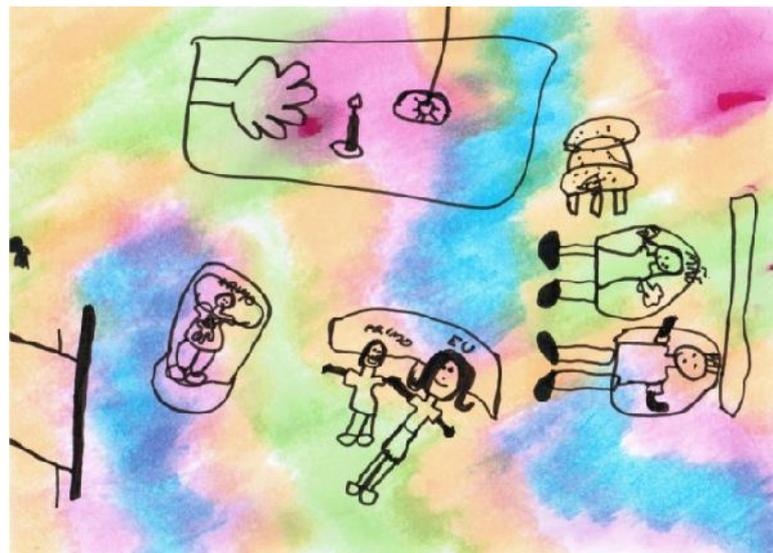


Fig. 252: Nanda's drawing of her family showing her cousins, by her side, whereas she has also not drawn her uncles.

<sup>58</sup> It is worth remembering that, according to an interview with Eduardo Nunes, president of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, between 1940 and 2007, the fecundity rate in Brazil has dropped 68.3%, approaching 1.9 children per woman in the 2010 Census (Ferrari, 2010).



loads of stuff together, run, play ball... but I only have my dog to play with!” Nanda says she would like to have a brother, even just to have someone to complain about: “If I had one, I would be able to teach him a lot of things and I would be able to put a note on my door saying *Keep Out!*”

A brother is also a future companion, João remarks. “Because, when we grow up, we will never be alone!” Thus, when the children are at their grandparents’, they often have the chance to play with their peers, which is something that they are not able to do that much at home or at school, since even the teachers

[...] are having less and less time to play with the children [...] Caught up in institutional educational projects rather than the children, they have increasingly less time and space to play. Or rather, the broader rationale of education is being allowed to [install itself] (Dornelles, 2011, p. 19 [in print]).

When the grandchildren do not have brothers and sisters or cousins nearby, the grandparents often insist that they make friends with the neighbors: “My granny always help me with this. I’m shy and I can’t play with other children. And, when I’m at her place, the neighbors sometimes invite me to swim in their pool or something... And they say, *Let’s play!*”; and I say, *No, no, I don’t want to*, because I’m shy, and she helps me sometimes, because, if she didn’t, I wouldn’t have anyone to play with”. In the drawing below, Felipe shows an attempt to make friends with a neighbor of his grandmother.

As family structures are becoming increasingly vertical, children often want to play with the adults around them, except that “they don’t have time” (André), “always have to work” (Alex) or “don’t have the patience to play” (Nanda). “I read in a book that, when people grow up, they don’t like to play any more”, says Yasmin. But, while parents don’t have time, grandparents are very willing to join the children in their games, when they are taking care of them, or at the weekend. As we shall see in the next chapter, games are a strong bond between these two generations.



Fig. 253: Felipe’s Drawing: “My granny helps me not to be shy and to play with other children”.

*“Granny isn’t like a mother. Nothing like that. We can play with her.*

*She’s like a little girl, just a bit older.”*

*(Lion, aged 8, research participant)*

## Chapter 5

### *Relationships. Learning, Sharing, Teaching*



(Source: Ajmera, Kinkade & Pon, 2009)

In the previous chapter, we saw that the grandparents' house is a special place for the grandchildren, which allows for much interaction between the two generations. When the children showed us the rooms and the furniture, it led us to imagine what goes on there. This is where they spend most time playing, talking and interacting with their grandparents. However, we did not dwell much on the details of the interactions that fuel these relationships. When children sit on the sofa to talk with their grandparents, what do they talk about? When they play with their grandparents, what do they play? When they go out together, where do they go? If development is, as Baltes (1987) suggests, a phenomenon that lasts a lifetime, what do grandparents and grandchildren learn from each other? What do the children make of these relationships?



## 5.1 Learning and Teaching

Starting out from the premise that learning is a two-way process, which occurs when the subject interacts with other subjects or the environment, it is fair to say that “adults teach and also learn, just like children” (Lion). This process of co-education occurs because, on the one side, “older people are wiser” (Catarina); “they have lived longer than us” (Melissa); “they have been children, they have been to school and college, and have a job” (Fernanda), so “are more experienced” (Amanda) and “have more experience of life” (Kátia). Because they are from another age, “they can teach us some things about *their time*. But we can teach them some things too about *our time*” (Carol). Thus, it is not only the children who learn and are socialized, as if their only job was to assimilate the world as transmitted by adults. If socialization is viewed in an interactionist manner, the dynamic of interaction in the acquisition of know-how is brought to the fore, and the existing bond between self-construction and construction of the other becomes important (Mollo-Bouvier, 2005). Thus, “it is no longer a question of supposing the action of one generation on another [...] but of considering that grandparents and grandchildren make each other and renew themselves as subjects in the course of this interaction” (Oliveira, 2007, p.7).

“Children also teach”, Érica says, “because we can find out a lot of things that adults don’t yet know” (Lion); “as they learnt things long ago, they may have forgotten” (Daniele), so “we can remind them” (Carol) and “help them learn again” (Betina). Furthermore, “in their day, lots of the things we have today, weren’t around: technology, that kind of thing. And we can teach them about this” (Baiano), “there are a lot more things to teach nowadays” (Luck). So, Daniele says, “I learn from the granny, but my granny also learns from me!”. Children can also use their know-how to transform the older people, who “are sometimes led to look deep into themselves and bring forgotten practices, lost memories and overlooked knowledge back to life [...] and, at others, are led by the hands of a child to get to know new games, new habits, things they have never tried before...” (Oliveira, 2007, p.6).



### 5.1.1 Learning and Teaching: the use of new technology



(Source: Ajmera, Kinkade & Pon, 2009)

As the children themselves mention, today's world is one full of new technology. It is present in computers, domestic appliances, shopping mall car-parks, cell-phones, libraries, bus cards, and ATMs. While they were born into a world filled with CDs, LCD TV, *Playstation*, remote-controlled cars, GPS, talking dolls and Lego monsters that move, most of their grandparents grew up in an age in which technology was not so important and using it does not come that 'naturally' to them. While these boys and girls from the upper-middle classes of the city of Porto Alegre, have lessons in IT and robotics and access to a LOGO language room in the school, their grandparents – mainly the older ones – probably grew up without such resources and attended a school where the only equipment was a blackboard and chalk and have adapted to technology over time, according to their personal motivation and the extent to which they have access.

Data from the *Cartoon Network* survey show that 77% of children aged between seven and nine years of age first visited the site of an online community when they were aged between five and eight, while 8% were aged between zero and four years when they first came into contact with the Internet (Tinti, 2008). For Dornelles (2005), cyber-children live a kind of *on-line* childhood, increasingly connected to "the digital world of computers, the Internet, games, the mouse, the self-service, the remote-control, *joysticks*, and *zapping*." (p.80). They move from one kind of technology to another, interacting with multiple realities. This cyber-childhood has given rise to a novelty in the relationship between



children and grandchildren, since boys and girls who were born into a world of technology cannot imagine a world without it (Dornelles, Amaral, Behar & Souza, 2009).

“I think that our grandparents don’t know how to use these things, because everything has changed”, Pedro says. “The lap top used to be a typewriter, the television the radio, the telephone was on a hook”; “In their day, they weren’t used to all this. The computer didn’t even exist, I think!” (Amanda). “I doubt that in their day they had computer games. So I think that they had to make up their own games”, says Lion. “Not even a fun park!” José exclaims, “because in my granny’s day, she says that they didn’t have dodgem cars!”. “Neither did they have computers or televisions. My granny told me that the TV only came when she was six years old”, Gabriella remembers. For Pedro, the world his grandmother lived in when she was a child was so different from today, that it is difficult to find any similarity:

Pedro – I teach my granny *how to work the television*, because she has bought a new big one and, since the TVs of the past were black and white, they couldn’t choose to have strong or light colors. So I teach her how to adjust the color. I also teach her *how to draw modern drawings*, because she would only draw those old houses. So, I have taught her how to draw. I also taught her how to do roofs and alligators. *Nothing was the same in those days. Even the alligators were different!*

As grandparents “have been alive for years, they only know the old technology; they don’t know how modern technology works” (Alexandra). Later, “in their day, everything was very expensive and they couldn’t afford to buy a computer and that kind of thing” (Yasmin). As the children have been in contact with “all the new technology since they were little” (Daniele), and the grandparents “never used to dabble with these things” (Daniele), it is up to them, the children, “to teach them to use the technology *that is there for them now*” (Pedro). So, the grandchildren frequently socialize *their grandparents* in this new world, teaching them new languages, how to surf the Internet, *chat on MSN*, reply to a text, use the mouse or see themselves on a webcam, and how they can interact with these seemingly strange pieces of equipment.

The children belong to a generation of digital natives, while their grandparents, with their help, are becoming digital immigrants, who have learnt to use technology in their old age. In the images below, we can see the granddaughter teaching her grandfather to use the computer – a new language – and he is saying that he has understood – “OK!” the grandfather responds; and a granddaughter who has mastered this new equipment is



teaching her grandfather something that he doesn't know. This is why he is smiling calmly



Fig. 254: Amanda's drawing: "Me teaching my grandfather to use the computer".



Fig. 255: Betina's drawing: "I teach my grandpa how to use the computer properly".

and responds in admiration, "Ah... now I understand!". In the examples below, we can see other situations where the children are the masters, teaching grandparents to use new technology:

*Adriana – I help my grandpa with the computer, because there are some things that I know that he doesn't... He has an orchid collection, and he has to write up the name of the plant, the kind of flower and I help him with this. I color the letters so that he knows whether it blooms in autumn or winter.*

*Luck – As my granny is a nurse, she needs to write down the name of patients. So I taught her how to do this on the computer. She liked it so much, that whenever she came home, she wants to write something. So I had to find a place for her to write.*



Fig. 256: Carol's drawing: "I was teaching my granny to use the computer".



Fig. 257: Lorenzo's\* drawing: "I teach my grandparents to use the computer". We can see the grandfather concentrating on this activity, while his grandson smiles.



The computer is clearly one of the pieces of technology most commonly mentioned by the children. They teach their grandparents “how to turn it on” (Jaqueline), “where to put things” (Érica), “how to use *Google*” (Diego) or how to “chat on MSN” (Carol). However, the children realize that it is an effort for the older generation to learn this new language. The children pointed to moving the mouse, the relation between the mouse and the screen, and the way icons are arranged as being things that their grandparents found it especially difficult to do. The teaching of this technology usually occurs in the grandparents’ own home, which means that most of them have their own computer, even though not all of them have mastered it<sup>59</sup>, as the following statements show.

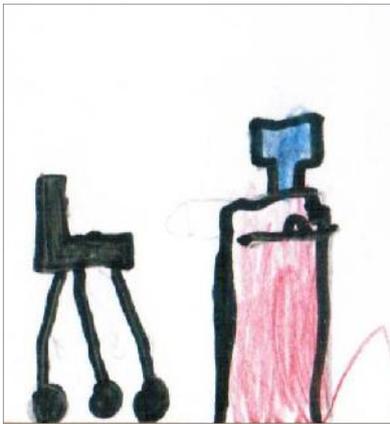


Fig. 258: Diego’s drawing: “I teach my grandmother *to use the computer she has... She knows nothing! Nothing at all!*”.

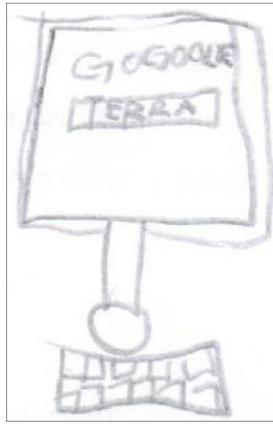


Fig. 259: Igor’s\* drawing: “I teach my granny how web technology works.”

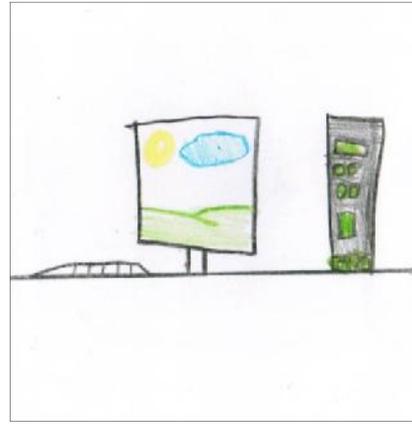


Fig. 260: Amanda’s drawing: “I teach my granny how to turn the computer on and access the Internet”.

Betina – I teach my grandpa to use the computer, because, sometimes, *he doesn't know very well* and he wants to see some family photos. He says to me, ‘*Help me get in?*’ And I say, ‘*Grandpa, click there!*’ *But he can't even move the mouse!*

Like other durable goods, the computer has become increasingly present in Brazilian homes. According to data from PNAD 2009, 34.7% of homes have a computer, with the Southern Region have the second largest proportion in the whole country: 42.6% (Carpanez, 2010). However, its use is strongly associated with age, income, level of education and digital inclusion (Doll, 2007). Data from the *Elderly in Brazil* survey that although the vast majority of elderly people have seen a computer (88%), only a small proportion (8%) have ever used

<sup>59</sup> This does not mean that the grandparents don’t use new technology. We saw, in the previous chapter, that the computer is an important means of communication between them and their grandchildren. However, most of the children appear to be more familiar and more adept, which means that they introduced their grandparents to the technology, improve their skills and help them with different programs. Some grandparents learn to turn the computer on and off, while others learn to use *Word* better, for example.



one. Interest in computers declines with age – being greater among younger elderly people (aged between 60 and 69 years) –, increases with higher levels of education – being greater among those who have attended secondary school or higher education –, and increases among wealthier segments of the population: 41% of people with a household income of over five minimum wages were interested in computers, compared to 24% among those who receive less than two (Doll, 2007). Of the children’s grandparents, most of them appear to be users who are interested, since more than half of the grandchildren showed, in the photos of their grandparents’ homes, where this appliance is placed in the home.<sup>60</sup>



Fig. 261: Computer in Alex’s grandparents’ house.

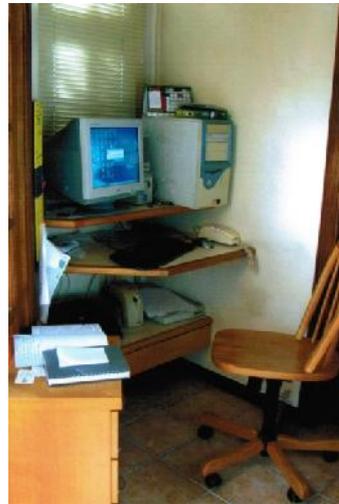


Fig. 262: Computer in Marcelo’s grandparents’ house.



Fig. 263: Computer in Fernando’s grandparents’ house.

Alex [on Photograph 1] – The Computer! I took this photo because, whenever I go to my grandparents’, I play a bit on the computer.

Marcelo [on Photograph 2] – I took a picture of the computer because *it is where I am all the time*. I like to play a lot...

Fernando [on Photograph 3] – My favorite place! It’s where the computer is!

Érica [who also photographed the computer] – Computer! Because I like to use the computer at my granny’s!

Adriana [who also photographed the computer] – This is my granny’s computer! It’s where I play and write things for her!

Diego [who also photographed the computer] – This is the computer. I took this photograph because I love using the computer at my granny’s. She lets me use the computer whenever I want! She just has to finish her business. And she likes it because I remove all the viruses!

<sup>60</sup> Even among the children who live with their grandparents, where the initiative to purchase a computer did not necessarily come from the grandparents, it can be seen that the grandchildren interact with them, teaching them to use this appliance.



But not all the grandparents want to learn to use it. As Peixoto and Clavairolle (2005) note, the use of this object requires users to immerse themselves in a new language, which means that it is only incorporated into “the repertoire of the equipment of a retired person who has not used it in their working life and is therefore not part of this new technical culture, thanks to help from outside” (p.87). This may often lead to a lack of interest on the part of older people: either because grandparents see no need to learn, or because they do not want to put themselves in the position of being an apprentice to a grandchild, or because they think that this may get in the way of their personal relations, since they can easily be replaced by virtual contacts. Carol notes, for example, that, although she wants to teach her grandmother to use the computer, she insists that she does not want to. In her drawing, Carol portrays herself with arms crossed and an “annoyed face”, while her grandmother is grinning.



Fig. 264: Carol’s drawing: “A sad memory”. She wants to teach her grandmother how to use the computer, but her grandmother refuses.

Carol – A sad thing for me was when I had an argument with my granny about the computer. [...] Because she didn’t want me to teach her to use it and we had an argument [...]. She has a computer, but she doesn’t know how to use it! And I wanted to chat with her on MSN, but she never logs on!

But the children do not only teach their grandparents how to use the computer. There are also cell-phones, TV sets, digital cameras, and DVD players, which are always being upgraded, with new models and new applications. Acquiring a new gadget thus often means learning how to use it, which is not always something that grandparents take easily to. “Older cell phones were easier to use”, Pedro says, “they were big and didn’t have many buttons. But now there are lots of different kinds! With the old ones, you pressed the button in the middle and you could answer. Nowadays, old people keep on trying to press the button in the middle, but no-one knows what the red key does, the green key and what is behind it”, he adds. What Pedro is trying to explain is that, whereas cell-phones used to be designed only for speaking, they are now multifunctional: you can write and receive text-



and voice-messages, take photographs, access the Internet, play games, do calculations, use it as an alarm clock or an agenda, or listen to the radio. All of this requires a new learning process, which goes well beyond pressing the button in the middle and saying “Hello.”

Alexandra also realizes that her grandmother, who changed her cell-phone recently, needs help learning how to use it: “It’s like her cell phone is ringing. But because she’s changed her phone and the one she had was really old, she doesn’t know what to do to answer it! So she calls me: ‘Alexandra! Alexandra! Come here! Come quick! What do I do? What do I do?’”. For Amaral (2010), technological discoveries are connected to a specific historical period, representing “unique experiences, specific to the life of each individual, each generation” (p.122). Laurence (2011),

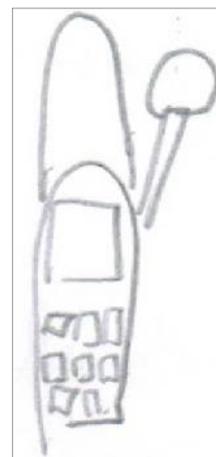


Fig. 265: Drawing by Thiago\*: “I teach my granny to use her cell phone”.



Fig. 266: Catarina’s drawing: “Me teaching my granny to use the cell phone, because I like to play around with it, but my granny doesn’t”.

presenting technology from 30 years ago (such as *gameboy*, record players, 5.25 diskettes, and cassette tapes) to a group of 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Canadian schoolchildren, shows that, just as grandparents are not very familiar with new technology, so children are unfamiliar with the old, and cannot handle it or understand what it is for.

Yasmin, reflecting on the cell phone, remarks: “My granny bought a lovely new cell phone, full of things. But what for? She doesn’t know how to use any of it!”. “Mine too”, says

Diego, “she bought a cell phone and doesn’t know how to use it. So, I started to fiddle about with it and try everything out and I found out where the camera is, where the messages are...”. “My granny can’t see the messages I send her!” Daniele exclaims.

It is the same with the television. Although it is not only one of the commonest household appliances in Brazil – with 95.7% of homes owning one (Spitz, 2010, data from PNAD 2009) –, but also one of the leisure activities most frequently engaged in by elderly people (Doll, 2007), not all of them know how to use it with facility, when this involves the



use of a remote control or a satellite/cable connection. Lucas says he teaches his granny to use the remote “because she can’t do it and tells me it’s broken, but I only had to press it a bit for it to work”, he recounts. Amanda also teaches her granny how to use the controls: “She never knows which control to use to turn on the NET and which to turn on the normal TV”, the girl says. José says he helps with the DVD player: “She can’t turn on the DVD player, so I always have to help her”, he remarks. In the drawings below, we can see some situations where the grandchildren help with electrical appliances.



Fig. 267: Gabriella’s drawing: “I help my granny to turn on the TV”.



Fig. 268: Lion’s drawing: “I teach my granny how to use the remote control”.

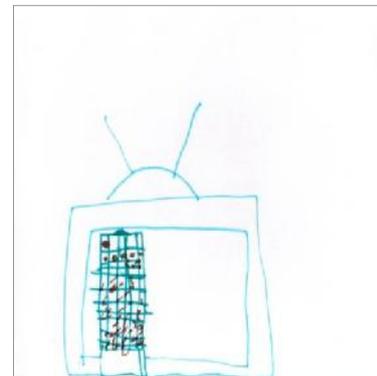


Fig. 269: Lucas’s drawing: “I teach my granny to use the remote”.

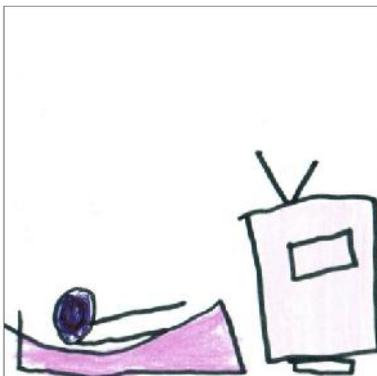


Fig. 270: José’s drawing: “I help my granny to find TV programs”.



Fig. 271: Felipe’s drawing: “I teach my granny to change TV channel”.



Fig. 272: Ana’s\* drawing: “I teach my granny how to turn on the DVD player”.

As mentioned above, new technology is also present in toys, which are increasingly sophisticated and industrialized. In *Chapter 4* we saw that many of the presents the grandparents give their grandchildren are electronic toys. For Peixoto and Clavairolle (2005), grandparents “have found that *being in touch with* information and communications technology allows them to relate to their grandchildren”, and, for this reason, they “are privileged clients in electronic games stores” (p.92). And just as childhood is plural and



changing, being “subject to changes whenever important social transformations occur” (Steinberg, 1997, p.99), so too is play: while “social creation, which also is, is culturally determined in the same way as childhood” (Fortuna, 2004, p.48), changing with the economic situation, the reduction in the number of open spaces in big cities and the spread of new technology. “At present, children are immersed in a new culture of a networked society. Childhood spaces and relations with the world have changed, as have their games, their ways of playing and the way they think and construct reality” (Dornelles et al. 2009, p.2). Thus, electronic games also appear in the games between grandparents and grandchildren as a new space for learning and interaction.

### 5.1.2 Learning and Teaching: new ways of playing and having fun



(Source: Ajmera, Kinkade & Pon, 2009)

Data from the national *Discovery of Play* study, which covered children aged between six and twelve years, showed that 60% children from classes A and B play with computer games or videogames (Carneiro & Dodge, 2007). Amidst the *joysticks* and consoles, the boys and girls visit a cyber world, trying to destroy enemies and overcome increasingly more difficult and enigmatic challenges thereby enabling them to move on to the next stage. Most of these games can be shared with other players and, when the grandchildren are with their grandparents, they are often included as their partners or opponents. The instructions and the rules of the game are given by the children, who teach the older generation this new



language – which also requires, like the computer, knowledge of technology and the development of motor skills – and teach them “to play the games of today” (Luca). In the drawing below, we can see a two-player videogame, in which the grandmother interacts with her grandson by playing with him: “I teach my granny to play videogames”, says Thiago\*. Baiano and Luck also invite their grandmothers to play, as can be seen from the dialogue reproduced below:

Baiano – I teach my granny to play videogames with me.

Luck – I’ve already taught her that!

Researcher – How did it go? Did they learn?

Baiano – Not much! She can’t even use the controls properly!

Luck – Mine learnt a bit. Sometimes we play, but she says she prefers to play real football...



Fig. 273: Thiago’s\* drawing: “I teach my granny to play videogames with me”.

These games often accompany the children when they visit their grandparents’. André, for example, took a photo of the *Playstation* at his maternal grandparents’ house (Fig. 274): “My *Playstation!*”, he exclaims, as he shows his photo to the group. “This is my new *Playstation 2* with my LCD TV. This *Playstation* stays at my granny’s, because I go there every day. But if we go to the farm I take it there to, and if I go to the beach, I take it to the beach, and if I go to Gramado, I take it to Gramado... wherever I go.... I take it!”, he explains.



Fig. 274: Photo of the *Playstation 2* that André has at his maternal grandparents’ house.



Although the children are more adept with this technology than their grandparents, this does not mean that there is a barrier between them. Their statements seem to show that the computer and the electronic games do not produce so much a distance or a conflict, but an interaction between them, through which these two generations can play and help

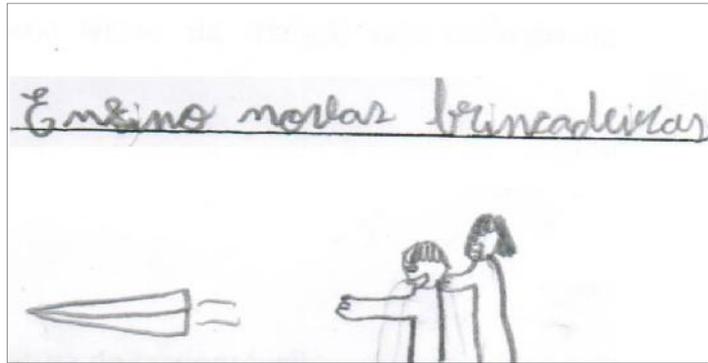


Fig. 275: Matheus's\* drawing: "I teach my grandparents new games".



Fig.276: Melissa's\* drawing: singing.

each other. But the toys and games "of today", to quote Luca, are not confined to computer and videogames. Alex says that he teaches his grandparents to play *General*, "that dice



Fig.277: Betina's\* drawing: Tick-tack-toe.



Fig. 278: Alex's drawing: the game of *General*.

game that's like poker"; Matheus\*, "to make a paper airplane"; Verônica\*, "to do origami"; Hernan\* and Leonardo\* "to play football"; Betina\*, "to play tick-tack-toe";



Fig. 279: Leonardo's \*drawing: football.

Élis\*, "to play tennis"; and Melissa\*, "to sing", while Yasmin teaches her grandmother "to play other games" with rules, expanding the range of possibilities. "I've taught her to play difficult games, because she only knows how to play cards", the girl says, and draws herself teaching her grandmother the *memory game*.



Fig. 280: Luca teaching his grandmother to play a new game: "I taught my Granny Ladi to play *Linci*".



Fig. 281: Yasmin teaching her grandmother to play the *memory game*: "I teach her games she doesn't know".

But it is not only the grandchildren who teach new ways of playing. The grandparents also bring new games and toys, which come from the own childhood. As Fortuna (2010) puts it,



Fig. 282: Glória\* learning to play backgammon with her grandfather.

[...] play is based on a dialogue between lifestyles. It does not seek homogeneity, that frustrating chimera; on the contrary, it is founded on communication between people, groups and cultures that have a mutual influence on one another, breaking with parochialism and ensuring cultural, cognitive, and behavioral diversity [n. p.].

Glória\*, for example, learnt to play backgammon from her grandfather (image on the left); Luiza\*, to play draughts (image on the right), Betina\*, to play "a paper folding game"; Isabela\*, "to play cards";



Fig. 283: Luiza\* learning to play draughts with her grandfather.

and while Alex taught his grandparents to play *General*, they taught him how to play *Pontinho* (Photo and drawing below). "I learnt when I was about five, I think. And we play a lot. Whenever my Uruguayan granny comes here, me and my grandpa play against my granny from here and my *abuela*. We play *Pontinho* on the table in the living room". Games are so important in relations with his grandparents that Alex even took a photo of the table where they play. "This is where we have fun", he says.



Fig. 284: Photo and drawing of Alex's maternal grandparents' living room. "I learn to play cards with my grandparents".

Learning to ride a bicycle is another thing the children remember. Guilherme\* recalls that it was his grandmother who taught him to ride a bike by himself, holding on to the saddle as he peddled, so that he wouldn't lose his balance (See image on the right). Matheus\* also achieved something with his grandparents: "I learnt how to ride a bike

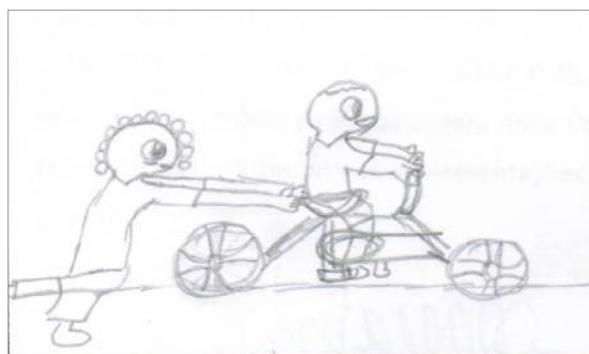


Fig. 285: Guilherme\* learning to ride a bike with his grandmother.



Fig. 286: Carol with her grandmother's bike at the Gasômetro. Her drawing shows, her (in blue) riding a large bicycle and her grandmother (in red) on a small bicycle, because they have swapped them.

without stabilizers", he says. Kátia began to learn to ride a bike with her mother, but "my grandparents taught me a bit more", she explains. And once the children have learnt to ride on two wheels, they can go cycling with their grandparents, taking on new challenges, as Carol recounts: "A really great memory that I have is going cycling with my granny. She was trying to ride on my bike and me on hers. We went to Gasômetro<sup>61</sup>. It was great! I was cycling with my granny and I had also taken some rackets

<sup>61</sup> Gasômetro is a tourist attraction in Porto Alegre on the Banks of Lake Guaíba. It is a region that used to be home to the Gasômetro coal-fired power station between 1928 and 1974, when it was decommissioned. Nowadays the Station has been transformed into a cultural center. Around the Gasômetro there is an area for cycling, walking and watching the sunset, and it is a popular place to go at the weekends.



that I got from a friend to play”.

The children also learn other ways of having fun with their grandparents, such as swimming and fishing. Yasmin remembers that it was her grandmother who taught her to play in the swimming pool she has: “She taught me to swim without floats”, she says. “I was afraid of being alone in the swimming pool at her place because I used to go to a club to learn to swim. So I wanted my granny to teach me, because I didn’t like the girl from the club. She was trying to drown me, getting me to pick up letters from the bottom of the pool. So, during the holidays, I was at my granny’s house, it was hot and I wanted to play in the swimming pool. So my granny taught me”, she remembers. Glória\* also learnt how to swim with her grandfather and Guilherme\* learnt “how to fish with [his] Grandpa René”: “I learnt to put a maggot on the hook and wait for a fish to bite”, as we can see in their drawings.

The grandparents also use their own skills to enhance the children’s play. Natasha’s grandmother, who sews, taught her granddaughter how to make clothes for her dolls: “I learnt to sew with needle and thread, but she also has a sewing machine and she said she’d teach me how to use that too”. The game does not begin when the clothes are ready and she can put her dolls on the catwalk to



Fig. 287: Yasmin learning to swim with her grandmother.



Fig. 288: Glória\* learning to swim with her grandfather.



Fig. 289: Guilherme\* learning to fish with his grandfather.



show off their new look; it begins before, with the whole process of choosing, cutting out, and stitching together the chosen look: “She looks in the magazines and we get our models from there and I think of the style I want for my doll and we make it. I have a basket full of Barbie clothes! All of them home-made! It’s really fun and I learn to sew too. My granny makes a lot of clothes for my Barbie!”. While Natasha makes the clothes, her granny “is in charge of” the sewing machine and Natasha becomes her assistant in the tailoring shop: “I help her to sew, to sit down at the machine, to put in the thread. I fetch the scissors, I choose the material and I thread the needle, because the hole is really small!”, the girl explains. It is the same with Catarina: “I always used to see my granny sewing, so I asked her if she would teach me how to sew too. So, I sometimes *play sewing with my granny*. She teaches me to sew with a needle! She also lends me the sewing equipment I don’t have”.



Fig. 290: Natasha’s drawing: her and her grandmother sewing Barbie clothes.



Fig. 291: Catarina learning to sew with her grandmother.

João also plays in his maternal grandmother’s sewing room, which he took photos of: “I took a photograph of granny’s sewing machine, because I sometimes go there and *play sewing with her*”. This is also one of the skills that João admires in his grandmother. “Look at this cupboard? [Image below] This is where my granny keeps her materials. I love to



Fig. 292: João’s grandmother’s sewing machine.



Fig. 293: Cupboard in the sewing room where João's grandmother keeps colored material.

poke around in here. This [sewing] is one of the things I most like that my granny does, because she makes beautiful things, because she has a cupboard full of things! She has a lot of material! *I love playing at sewing with a needle, and she teaches me!*", he exclaims. João also brings his grandmother's work to school: "Those bags that I bring for lunch, my granny makes them...".

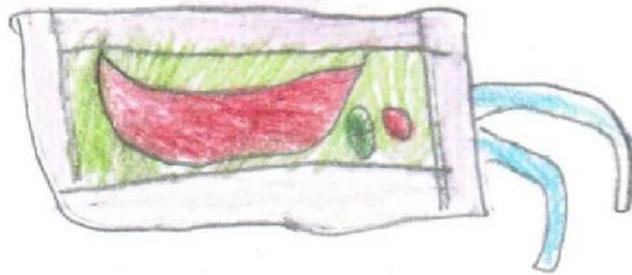


Fig. 294: Example of the home-made bags that João's grandmother makes for him to take to school.

Material, thread, patterns, cutting: "the children are interested in rags, shards and pieces" (Benjamin, 1992, p.46) and the grandmothers frequently give them to opportunity to invent and create. This is how Natasha, Catarina and João immerse themselves in their grandmother's sewing room, fascinated by the colorful world of material and thread and by what they can do with their own hands. Adriana also likes to play at cutting out patterns with her grandmother, except she uses paper: "My granny taught me how to make a scrap-book. We cut out pictures from her women's magazines and put together a scrap book". When she presents the photos that she took at her paternal grandmother's, she shows where she keeps these things. "This is my drawer! [Fig. 295] Can you see the things in it? At the bottom? These are what I make the scrap-book with! They are cut-out pictures of women. I take my grandmother's



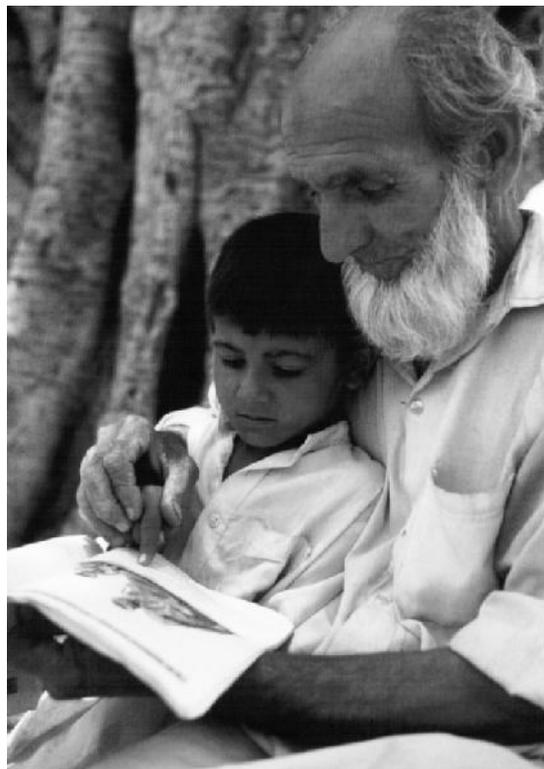
Fig. 295: Drawer where Adriana and her grandmother keep the magazines they use to make their scrap-books of women wearing different clothes.



catalogues and we cut out pajamas and change the clothes and that... I love doing this! We have put together a lot of scrap-books together!"

As Fortuna (2004) reminds us, the word “play” in Portuguese (*brincar*) is a corruption of the Latin word *vinculum* (which changed from *vinclu*, to *vincru* and finally to *vrinco*). Etymologically, “both games and play contain the idea of a tie, a relation, a bond, placing individuals in relation to themselves, to others, and the world.” (Fortuna, 2004, p.49). This other is often the grandmother or grandfather, who is involved in caring for their grandchildren or sees them on the weekends. According to the Italian survey, *La vita quotidiana di bambini e ragazzi* [The Day-to-Day Life of Babies and Children] (ISTAT, 2008), the number of children who play with their grandparents has increased in recent years. On week days, 20.6% of Italian children aged between three and ten play with their grandfather and 25.4% with their grandmother, which is a highly relevant piece of information for this study, because most of the examples given by children refer to grandparents. And, as the children interviewed are of school age, when they are with their grandparents, homework represents another educational bond between them.

### 5.1.3 Learning and Teaching: schoolwork



(Source: Ajmera, Kinkade & Pon, 2009)



After school, it is time to do the homework, and the help of the older generation is important. The school subjects mentioned most often by the children were Portuguese and Mathematics, but a significant number of children also receive help with English and Spanish homework. “My granny always helps me with homework”, Diego says, “whenever I go to her house, which is twice a week, she helps me”. Daniele also receives help from his grandmother with Math homework: “She helps me to do sums when I go there. You can ask her any number and she’ll answer in seconds!”. Carol learnt from her grandmother “a cool way of learning the nine times table. You put 0, 1, 2, 3... up to 9 and then do the same thing from the bottom up, and you have all the right answers!”, she says. These examples show that the relation between family members is educational and an act of cultural negotiation. In these negotiations, the children also take advantage of their grandparents’ schooling to ask for help, as Diego and Melissa reveal:

Diego – My grandpa helps me with sums. *He’s an engineer*, and he gives me six number sums to do every day, because I go to his office. He also helps me to do the English homework, because he knows English well. And my granny helps me with other homework, mainly drawing, because she is a teacher.

Melissa – My granny teaches me math. *She’s a math teacher. She teaches engineering*, that sort of thing. So, she knows a lot! So she’s always helping me!

In the images below, we can see various occasions on which the grandparents teach their grandchildren how to do their homework. We can also see the strong presence of women in helping with this task, as we saw throughout Chapter 2.



Fig. 296: João’s drawing: “This is my granny teaching me how to do the math homework on the glass table at her place”.



Fig. 297: Amanda’s drawing: “My granny helps me do the math homework”. “You have to add up her”, the grandmother says.



Fig. 298: Kátia’s drawing: “I always see Granny Zu on the weekends and she helps me with my homework”.





second, the boy. The learning process is interactive and symmetrical: both know different things and both can teach.



Fig. 299: Fernando's drawing: "I am teaching her things I learnt at school".



Fig. 300: Fernando's drawing: "My granny is teaching me the things she knows".

It is not only one generation giving something, while the other passively receives the data. This linearity conceals the movement and does not permit us to see the reciprocal influences. In other words, it is not just the passing of knowledge from the older generation to the children. The latter also transmit a lot of information to the former (Oliveira, 2007, p.8).

The fact that the children see themselves as having knowledge stimulates intergenerational relations and the roles of teacher and learner. The elderly have something to pass on, but the children are far from being passive objects in this process: the generations are in flux and are constantly remaking themselves (Oliveira, 2007). Thus, all the children say that they teach something to their grandparents. For Amanda, her grandparents learn from her "because there are subjects we do where there have been discoveries, such as Biology, in which there are a lot of new things that they didn't learn to tell them, because things have changed. So they don't know it. So *we teach them something that they haven't learnt yet, that they don't know*". Leonardo says he tells his grandmother stories from Greek mythology, Nanda and Luck say they teach a bit of English – in the image above, Luck is explaining to his grandmother that *to have* is 'ter', in Portuguese –, and Fernanda explains

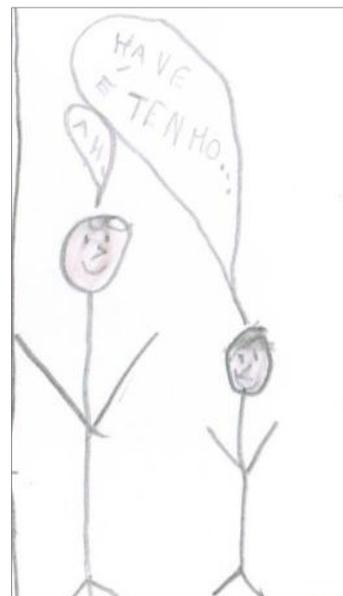


Fig. 301: Luck's drawing: "Me teaching my granny to speak English".

is explaining to his grandmother that *to have* is 'ter', in Portuguese –, and Fernanda explains



grammar rules. “Last weekend, I taught my granny what hiatus is, because she didn’t know and she asked me and I told her”. In the drawings below, we can see that Rodrigo\* and Luiza\* are also telling their grandparents something they learnt at school.



Fig. 302: Rodrigo's\* drawing: "Me teaching my grandparents things that I have learnt at school". [Do you remember the formula of the water?]



Fig. 303: Luiza's\* drawing: "Me teaching my grandparents things they don't remember from school".

Grandchildren also help their grandparents to read more. “When my granny reads stories to me, I correct her punctuation. My granny sometimes has difficulty reading, and I help her”, Lucas says. Amanda and Betina correct their grandmothers’ pronunciation of words. As they come from the countryside, their grandmothers have a strong accent, pronouncing words differently from the way they are pronounced in the big city. “I correct my granny’s pronunciation. It’s really funny the way that she says the words!”, explains Amanda. Kenner, Ruby, Jessel, Gregory and Arju’s study (2007), conducted with English and Bengali children living in the UK, have likewise shown that there is reciprocity in teaching



and learning between these two generations. While the grandparents teach Bengali to their grandchildren, preserving their ethnicity, cultural history, and customs, the grandchildren introduce their grandchildren to the English language and culture, which is often still unfamiliar to the older generation. The children also facilitate the family's integration into the community, because they become fluent in English quicker and are better able to understand and communicate in the new language, thereby creating a kind of bridge between their family and the new country. Some children also correct the pronunciation of their grandparents, helping them to learn this new language. On the grandparents' side, the teaching of Bengali also takes the form of story-telling, poetry-reading, songs, with the reading of the Koran being one of the main sources of linguistic interaction. As we shall see in the next section, the transmission of religious values is something that involves the grandparents a great deal.



Fig.304: Betina's drawing: "I teach my granny to pronounce words correctly".

#### 5.1.4 Learning and Teaching: values



(Source: Ajmera, Kinkade & Pon, 2009)

The transmission of values is one of the powerful roles the older generation assumes in the family. The children show how family values coincide with school culture, which to



some extent complements what they learn at home. In the case of religious values, many children see their grandparents engaged in spiritual activities, going to a place of worship or practicing religious devotions at home. Many participate in these rituals, sharing moments of prayer with their grandparents. Lucas can see his grandmother is religious from the house: "In my grandmother's bedroom there's a *huge Holy Bible* that she is always reading", the boy says. The Bible is also present in Nycolle's grandparents' house: "My granny helps me to read the Bible. We read it almost every day. I read a little bit almost every day. She reads a bit and then I read a bit to her".

According to Attias-Donfut and Segalen (1998), grandparents often assume the role of *missionaries* in their families, explaining the religious significance of Santa Claus, Easter, Yom Kippur, Ramadan, the birth of baby Jesus, and so forth, and showing them the meaning of certain symbols, such as the egg, the crib, Solomon's seal, the Om or the advent candles. Catarina says she always goes to her grandmother's house when she prays a Novena: "My granny likes to pray Novena at home, so I pray with her", the girl says.

In everyday life, the grandparents introduce their grandchildren to religion, reading with them from the sacred books or teaching them their first prayers. Religion, from early childhood onwards, functions, in many cultures, not only to make the child serve, but also to invite them to get involved in religion from an early age (Dornelles, 2010). André remembers that it was his grandmother who taught him to pray, putting "my hands together before I go to sleep". Luck also learnt to pray from his grandmother:

Luck – I pray every night. She taught me to say the *Lord's Prayer* and *Ave-Maria*. I was really little when she taught me. She said the words and I repeated them. I remember she taught me that prayer to Saint Anthony. I have never forgotten it!

It was the same for Carol: "I remember that I was three and it was my granny who taught me to pray. She said, 'Let's pray that your guardian angel will always protect you!' And I prayed...". In the children's drawings we can see that praying follows a ritual. Luck's grandmother is saying in his drawing "this is how you pray", putting her hands together and her grandson is copying the gesture (Fig. 305). The same



Fig. 305: "I drew my granny teaching me to pray because this is good and important".



is happening in Marcelo's drawing (Fig. 306). In André's drawing (Fig. 307) we can see that he has learnt how to pray, doing on his own what his grandmother taught him. "My grandmother taught me how to kneel down, put my hands together and pray", he explains.

Sometimes pray takes place in the home, – reading the Bible or praying before going to bed–, at others in places of worship. Carol goes to church every weekend with her grandmother: "We used to go every other weekend, but now I'm going to have my first communion, we go either on Saturday or Sunday", the girl says. Verônica\* also goes to church with her grandmother. "My granny likes to go to Mass and I always wake up at 8 to see the Mass on TV. I almost always go with her", Verônica\* says. It is the same with Alex\*, who drew a church altar with an image of Christ on the Cross and the chalice used by the priest (See drawing below). In Matheus's\* drawing, we can also see a religious object: "My granny teaches me to pray with a crucifix", he says. In the words of Somé (2007),

any ritual begins with preparation of the sacred space and the erection of an altar [...] I remember, when I was a child, how my grandparents got me involved in religious rituals [...] Just as a mother teaches a child to walk, she guided us a little and, when we fell, encouraged us to keep trying (p.57).

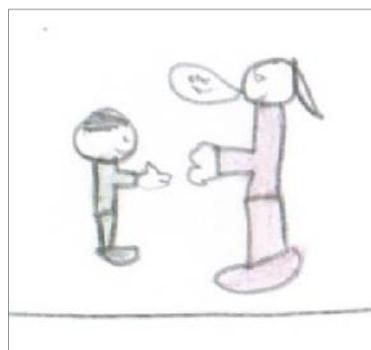


Fig. 306: Marcelo's\* drawing: "My granny teaching me to pray".



Fig. 307: André's drawing: "I learn to pray with my grandmother".



Fig. 308: Alex's\* drawing: learning to pray in church.



Fig. 309: Matheus's\* drawing of himself learning to pray with a crucifix from his grandmother.



The values handed down by the grandparents also concern respect for others and solidarity. These are often based on the grandparents' religious beliefs, or on more universal ethical principles, such as fairness, honesty, and compassion (Walsh, 2004). Pedro says that his grandmother "teaches him to be polite"; Nanda, "to know right from wrong"; Davi, "to have good manners"; Felipe, "not to meddle with other people's things"; João "to talk properly and not swear"; Alexandre "to say 'thank you'"; Nycolle, "to say 'you're welcome'"; Jaqueline, "that it is important to show respect and help people"; Alice, "to respect her elders"; Igor\* "that lying is bad"; Milene\* "to be good" and Rodrigo\* "to say sorry", as we can see in the drawing below.



Fig. 310: Rodrigo's\* drawing: "I learn from my grandparents how to be polite and say sorry". "Sorry Sir", he wrote in his drawing.

In Luck's drawing (on the right) we can also see his grandmother raising her hand and telling him with a smile to "Show respect!" to which he replies "OK!". According to a study



Fig. 312: Jaqueline's drawing: "I learn from my grandparents that it is very important to show respect and help people".

by Peixoto (2000), involving elderly people from Rio de Janeiro and Paris, grandparents use the time when they are looking after their grandchildren, or the times they visit or phone them "to pass



Fig. 311: Luck's drawing: "My granny teaching me to respect people".

on moral and social values (respect for others, especially one's elders, honesty, the importance of family, the value of work, family history, and so forth), as many of them think that



parents today neglect to do this” (p.107). The children do not mention their parents directly in this respect, but make it clear that their grandparents are greatly involved in this task. All the children who took part in this study remember having been taught some kind of moral value by the older generation.

## 5.2 Grandparents and Grandchildren Going Out Together, companions on journeys short or long



(Source: Ajmera, Kinkade & Pon, 2009)

But it is not only within four walls that grandparents and grandchildren can have fun and share new ideas and experiences. They also interact outside the home, as when they visit places in the city or venture beyond. On the street, the grandparents show the children the living history of the city, pointing out its tourist attractions, its crossings and its green areas. Catarina seems to fondly remember the day when she and her grandmother went to Porto Alegre city center: “We went after school. We had lunch and went out! My granny took me to various places in the city center! I saw lots of people passing by and some old buildings. Then, we went to Redemption Park”<sup>62</sup>, the girl says. Redemption Park is also

<sup>62</sup> *Redemption Park* is situated in the central region of the city. It has an area of 37.5 hectares, where there is a lake with a pedal boat, a children’s zoo and a small fun park. It is the place that people who live in Porto Alegre visit most, mainly on the weekends, when there is a local crafts fair and street theater.



mentioned by José, who remembers a day when his grandmother came from Brasília to visit the South and took him “various places that [he] didn’t know very well... She took me to some places, because she has lived here a bit, but I haven’t. She took me to a park, a mall, the playground in the park... we rode on the big wheel and the roller-coaster that turns you upside down” (Fig. 313).

When grandparents and grandchildren go out, the green areas appear to be their preferred destinations: visits to parks or the Botanical Gardens were remembered by the children as special days out, during which they could have contact with plants and animals that they normally don’t see in the city. Yasmin remembers “a walk in the woods with a guide to see lots of different animals”, while Ashley remembers the day she visited the Botanical Gardens (Fig. 314): “It was a Saturday. So there was nothing to do at home and I wanted to do something different. And my grandpa had the idea of going there, so we did. There were lots of lovely plants!” the girl recounts.

Grandparents also take them to the movies and share new discoveries: “My granny loves going to see children’s movies with me!” Leonardo exclaims; Giovana\* remembers the day she went with her mother and her 82-year-old grandmother, to the planetarium “to see a film about the planets” (Fig. 315); and Fernanda remembers with a smile the day she managed to convince her grandmother to go to the movies with her: “I wanted to see *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*, which was showing at the movie

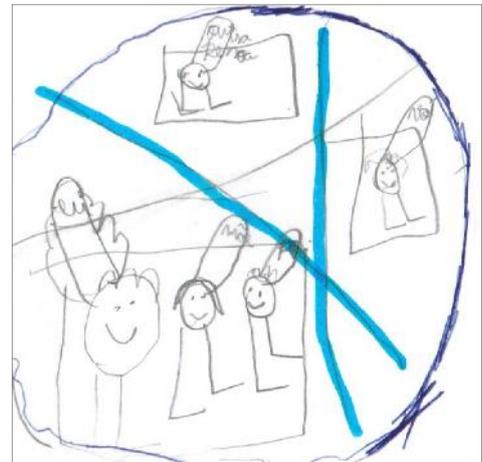


Fig. 313: José and his family riding the big wheel in Redemption Park.



Fig. 314: Ashley and his grandparents in the Botanical Gardens, surrounded by a variety of plants.



Fig. 315: Giovana\* with her mother and grandmother in the planetarium, surrounded by the constellations.



theater. So I invited her, I insisted... I said, *'Please! Please! Please!'* Until she was fed up with it and said, *'OK! Let's go and see it!'*" Fernanda had an important reason to invite her grandmother to go with her alone to see the film:

Fernanda – It's really boring going out with parents and grandparents together... we ask our grandparents for something but our parents keep saying, *'No, because your granny has this or that...'* but when our parents aren't with us, they say, *'later'*, and it really is later! Like: I ask granny for a big Mac and afterwards, before we go, she really buys me one...

"Grandparents", Alexandre says, "always put the grandchildren first", "they always take us out when we ask" (Alice) and "they do everything we want!" (Melissa).

Further afield, trips with grandparents usually occur during the summer holidays, when many children go to the beach with them. At the seaside, they can "walk on the dunes, take a dip in the sea and watch the stars reflected in the sea", Luiza\* says, remembering the holidays she has spent with her grandparents in Ibiraquera, Santa Catarina. As she depicts in her drawing, at the seaside, she can play in the sand with her bucket and spade, sunbathe, and enjoy the company of her grandparents.



Fig. 316: Luiza\* at the seaside with her grandparents.

Kátia also remembers "having a lot of fun" at the seaside with her grandparents: "We jump the waves, play games, build sandcastles...". "Once", she says, "we even found a crab's claw, because when a crab does this [pinches someone], it loses its claw, and it stays stuck in you... so, I found this crab's law and I put it on top of the castle that my granny was building



with me". The seaside snacks are also special. Yasmin tells us that when she goes to the seaside with her grandmother, she can "eat crepes and wander around", while Milene\* says she "eats loads of ice cream, eats corn on the cob, drinks coconut water, eats toasted cheese and *churros* all the time". In her drawing (below), we see a picture of a happy moment, when she, her parents, and her grandparents "are laughing, having fun, paddling in the sea", she says.

However, going to the seaside with grandparents can also give rise to conflicts. When the children are at the seaside, they run about under the sun, swim out too deep, stay in the sea until they get hungry and their fingers wrinkle. So, "sometimes it's a bit boring going with grandparents, because my granny, for example, is always arguing with me. I want to carry on playing and she says 'No! That's enough! Let's go home! It's getting cold! It'll be time to sleep soon! Tomorrow we can play again!'" (Carol). Sometimes grandparents are worried about the sea and the risk of drowning, which restricts the children's play in the water. Luck says that, whenever his grandmother is with him, "she doesn't let [him] go out very far into the sea": "I have to stay in the shallow part, the really shallow part! So shallow that I can't swim!" he says.

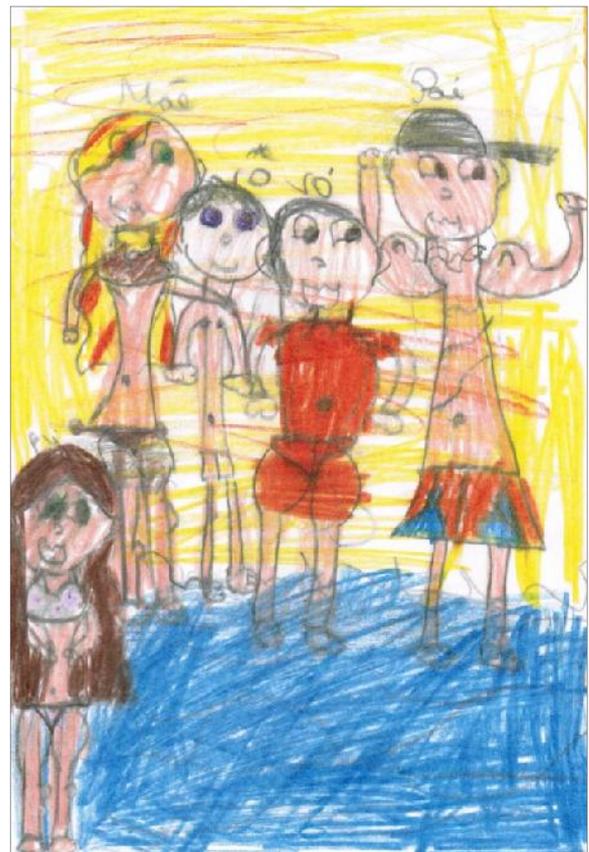


Fig. 317: Milene's\* drawing: Family holidays in Florianópolis.

The seaside also has its traditions. When the children go regularly to the same city – many saying that they have a seaside home –, they develop ties with that place and with the rituals that they always follow when they go back there. This is a new place for the family to be together, where different generations can get to together to relax, play, and make the most of their time together. Alexandre, for example, remembers that whenever he goes to the seaside with his family, his grandmother makes homemade pasta: "She makes it for the



seaside, because at the seaside *there are seven of us*. And My God! *She makes three kilos* and it disappears really quick!” he remembers with a nostalgic air. Alex remembers the restaurant where he and his family always stop off to eat fish: “*Our beach* is in Meia Praia. We always go there and sometimes my grandparents go with us. In this city there’s a fish restaurant and we almost always go there to eat”, the boy remarks, showing by his use of the possessive pronoun, that they see both the beach and the restaurant as their own. Érica remembers the New Year rituals she performs with her grandmother at the seaside: “I’ve drawn me and my grandmother at the seaside, because, at the end of the year, we go there to my uncle’s and we have a lot of fun! Me, my granny, my grandpa, my mum and my dad. *We jump seven waves in the sea and watch fireworks...*”.



Fig. 318: André on holiday at the seaside with his grandparents: “This person with the *chimarrão* is my brother’s aunt, this is my granny, me, my cousin, my grandpa, my brother and my uncle. We were in Rainha do Mar”.



Fig. 319: Érica with her grandmother watching at the fireworks at the seaside.

But, if, on the one hand, there are places that they keep going back to, there are other trips that are unique and hold an important place in the life history of these children. For Alice, an unforgettable journey was when she went with her grandmother, her parents and her sister, to Fortaleza:

Alice – *My granny almost never travels with us, she always stays at home... she only goes out to buy stuff. So, when she does travel, it is always a great thing!* And, this time, I think that my mum managed to convince her to go and we enjoyed it a great deal! We went to *Beach Park* and my granny even let us take a photo of her, which is something she doesn’t like... she can’t stand people taking photographs, but there she let us!

For Luck, it was the cruise he went on with his grandparents:



Luck – I went on a cruise to various cities and this is a great memory! I went with my granny, my grandpa, and my aunt and uncle. We went to Ilhéus, Maceió, Salvador, Búzios... It was my birthday present! I remember riding in the Lacerda elevator... My mother doesn't much like traveling. It's my granny and grandpa who like it! And me! I like it too, so they invited me to go with them!

And, for Adriana, it was the car trip to the Missões region:

Adriana – I remember it took a long time to get there. It was great! We went there for Easter, me, my mum, my dad, my granny and my grandpa. I remember that my granny and I bought handcrafts and then we went to the church they have there.

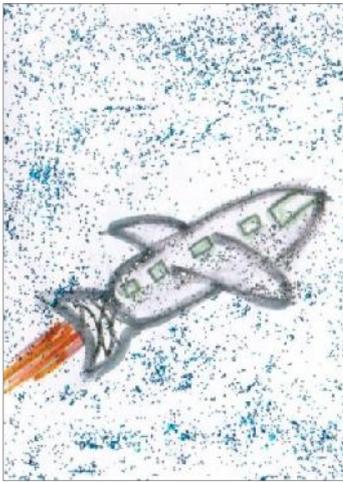


Fig. 320: Alice flying to Fortaleza with her grandmother.



Fig. 321: Luck on a cruise with his grandparents.



Fig. 322: Adriana driving to Missões with her parents and grandparents.

By land, sea or air, most of these children have had the chance not only to be with their grandparents at home, but also to discover the new sights, sounds, flavors and smells that travel provides. With or without the parents, grandparents and grandchildren show that they can be great travel companions. And, as Jaqueline shows us, in her drawing (on the right), this can begin in very early childhood: "I drew here my first trip to Canela with my granny. It was me, my mum, my dad and her. I don't remember much about it because I was still a babe in arms. I drew this because I've seen the photos we have at home and thought it was cool. My mother told me that it was my first big trip and I thought it was great that it was with her!" the girl says.



Fig. 323: Jaqueline's drawing: in her grandmother's arms on her first trip.



### 5.3 Different Generations Helping and Caring for Each Other



(Source: Laffon & Laffon, 2008)

Throughout this study, we have seen various situations that demonstrate the different kinds of care provided by the older generation, which can be grouped together, using Denham and Smith's (1989) categories, into direct, indirect, and symbolic interactions. *Direct interactions* are those that occur without the mediation of the middle generation – sometimes of necessity –, involving only grandparents and grandchildren. These occur when grandparents pick up their grandchildren from school, cook their meals, help them with their homework, look after them when they are ill, give them pocket money, teach them to speak, walk, or tie their shoelaces.

*Indirect interactions* occur when grandparents help their children with their everyday tasks, cleaning their homes at the weekend, refurbishing a room, putting them up at times of crisis, resolving conflicts and helping out with the family budget. It is “when mummy is short of money and granny helps her out” (Pedro), when the grandmother helps “dad to buy a new wardrobe for me” (Daniele) or “helps mum to buy things to do up my room” (Yasmin). In this way, the grandparents enhance the physical well-being of their grandchildren and allow parents and children to spend more time together. When Alice's grandmother washes



clothes for her family, for example – “It’s always granny who washes our clothes” (Alice) –, she is reducing the amount of time that parents have to spend on housework, and increasing their leisure time. *Symbolic interactions* concern the emotional receptiveness of the grandparents,



Fig. 325: Isabella\* interacting directly: “My grandmother always picks me up from school”.



Fig. 326: Giovana\* interacting directly: “My granny helps me to talk”.

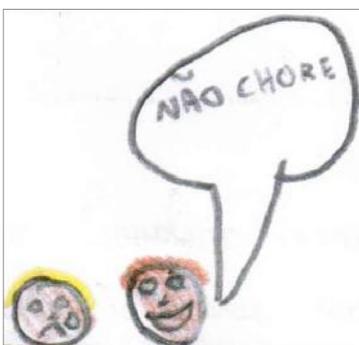


Fig. 327: Fernando\* interacting symbolically: “My grandparents are bosom pals”.

intergenerational ties and family heritage. These

highlight ties of friendship and trust and the fact that children know “they have someone they can count on” in times of crisis or when they need help, as the children say in their own words:

Alice – *When I’m at school, I always need something, but I don’t ring my mum, I ring my gran... because I’d feel bad about ringing my mum, because she has to work and so it’s my gran who always helps me!*

Jaqueline – *My granny stays with me so I’m not left at home alone. If I need something, I know that she is always there for me!*

João – *When we’re upset about something, she comes and gives us some advice, helps us to calm down!*

Natasha – *Grandparents are always there when we need help. They like us a lot and we know that we can count on them!*

However, this support network clearly does not work in only one direction, and is usually a reciprocal relationship between the generations. So, just as the grandparents help the grandchildren, so the grandchildren help their grandparents. With housework, for example, the children help the older generation, not only with the cooking, as we saw in the last chapter, but also “to wash up” (Betina), “clean the garage” (Catarina), “lay the table” (Alexandra), “wash clothes” (Alice), “tidy the bedroom and the living room” (Ashley), “take the plates from the table” (Mariana\*), “shut the windows”



Fig. 324: Nanda receiving direct assistance from her grandmother: “She helps me to push the seat forward so that I can eat, which I can’t do on my own!”.



(Catarina) and “tighten the screws in the saucepan” (Fernando) – tasks which, as we can see, are heavily determined by the gender of the child.

When the grandparents are elderly, the children also help them with everyday things, such as walking or going up and down stairs. With age, muscles weaken and joints become stiff, making it difficult to move around (Netto, 2004). Children can see that their grandparents need help with this and often offer to help them: “I help my granny to climb the stairs”, Betina says, “because she struggles to climb them. So I help her, saying, ‘Granny! One step forward, then another, then another... and you’re there!’”. It is



Fig. 328: Érica helping her grandmother lay the table.

the same for Rodrigo\*, who portrays himself helping his paternal grandmother go downstairs (See picture below), helping her to use her cane, and with Diego: “I always catch my granny, when she is about to fall”, he says.



Fig. 329: Rodrigo\* helping his grandmother go down stairs.

On the streets, grandparents also evidence less agility than the children do. Érica says that she helps her grandmother by slowing down to her pace: “I always wait for her, because she is old. She lags behind when we are walking, so I always run back to help her”, she says. Betina also helps her grandmother walk on the dirt track, “because, where she lives, it’s full of stones; it’s a dirt track with some big stones and she has difficulty walking, so I help her. I take her arm and walk with her”. If, in the countryside, the

challenge is the rocks in the street, in the cities, it is the pedestrian crossing, which sometimes doesn’t allow enough time for the elderly to cross the street, and the heavy traffic, as Guilherme\* and Hernan\* show in their drawings:

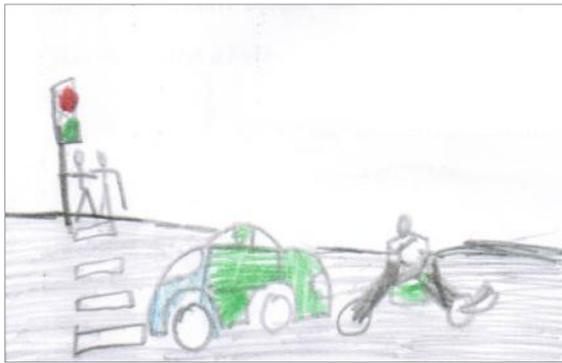


Fig. 330: Hernan's\* drawing: "I help my granny to cross the road".

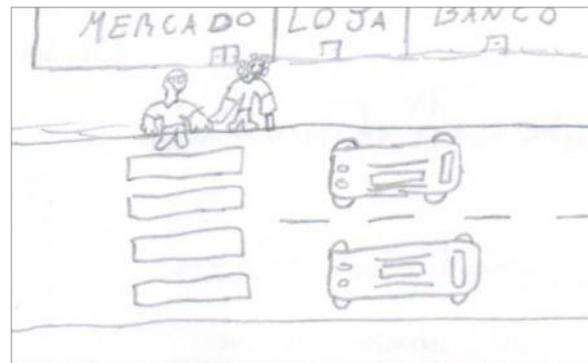


Fig. 331: Guilherme's\* drawing: "Me helping my granny to cross the road".

Grandchildren also help their grandparents with the shopping. José says that his maternal grandmother sometimes asks him for help: "She says, 'José, carry this heavy box, will you?' So I carry it for her"; and sometimes it is his paternal grandmother: "She is always asking me and my father to carry her shopping to the car", he says. Diego also helps his grandmother to carry shopping, whenever he goes to the supermarket with her: "She can't carry it all herself", he explains. In the drawing on the right, Carol depicts this: "Here I am helping my granny carry the shopping from Zaffari Bourbon<sup>63</sup> because it is heavy, and I say: 'Can I carry something for you?'. And she says yes".



Fig. 332: Carol helping her grandmother to carry shopping.

Children can make an important contribution by helping grandparents to carry things, to walk, to cross the road, or get up and down stairs, saving them from a possible fall. According to WHO data (2010), falling is the most frequent and most serious domestic accident among the elderly population. 28% to 35% of individuals aged over 65 suffer a fall each year, and the figure rises to 32% to 42% for those aged over 70. Factors contributing to this include failing eyesight, deformed feet, poor mobility and balance and lack of physical strength. Environmental factors include uneven or slippery surfaces, carpets, inappropriate shoes and poor lighting (Melo & Azevedo, 2007). The main underlying causes of falls are hip fractures, strokes and injuries to the upper limbs, which may lead, after a fall,

<sup>63</sup> Zaffari Bourbon is a supermarket chain in Porto Alegre.



to dependence, loss of autonomy, confusion, immobility, depression and restrictions on daily activities (WHO, 2010), as Alex and Felipe well know.

“My granny, since she broke her leg, hasn’t been able to walk”, Alex says. “She can walk, but she needs help [...]. It all happened because *it was dark* and she wanted to go to the bathroom. *But she couldn’t see properly*, tripped, and broke her leg”, he explains. The same thing happened to Felipe’s great-grandmother: “My great-grandmother was in the elevator. The elevator stopped, but there was a sort of step, that she didn’t see. And my great-grandmother is really old! So she didn’t see and fell flat on her face. I went to visit her in hospital. Now, after that, she is bed-ridden. There’s something wrong with her head and she can’t walk, people can’t



Fig. 333: Lorenzo’s\* drawing: “My granny slipped and fell, and I helped her up”.

understand her when she talks, she just sleeps now”, the boy recounts.

Felipe cannot do much for his great-grandmother. As she lives in the Northeast, he



Fig. 334: Felipe’s drawing: “My great-grandmother falling in the elevator”. We can see that she is crying out in pain and calling for help.

can only visit her during the holidays. But Alex, who lives in the same city as his maternal grandmother, says he always helps her when he can: “I always help my granny, giving her a kiss, a hug, helping her up to the table to eat with us, getting her a glass of water... I help her because, that way, she’ll get better quicker!”. Alex also says that his grandmother “is out of it sometimes”: “we say something to her and she answers different question. So we have to give her her medicine”, the boy says. On these occasions, “she says she can

see little animals, but there’s nothing there! And she says to me, ‘*There’s a little animal here! Get it off me!*’ So, I go to her and do this [he pretends to flick off an insect], and she says it’s



Fig. 335: Drawing by Alex: "I help my granny by fetching her a glass of water when she's thirsty".

on the floor... and I leave it at that...". Alex's family seems to be quite heavily involved in caring for his grandmother:

Alex – *My mother goes there all week, because she has to look after her. My granny sometimes has problems, and needs help to walk. Once they came to our place. My mum, my dad, and my sister went to the supermarket and left us together. And my granny wanted to go to the bathroom and my grandpa can't strain himself too much [...] so my granny tried to go on her own, but we could see she was going to fall and so we had to help her, because my grandpa can't lift he ... because he can't strain himself...*

In the detail of Alex's map (below), we can see that he has drawn a thick line between his and his maternal grandparents' house and written, "We go more, they come less", indicating that the regularity of contact is due to the care provided for the older generation, centered principally around his mother: "My mother is always going and I go there occasionally during the week and always on Saturdays and Sundays", he says. Nanda's parents and uncles also

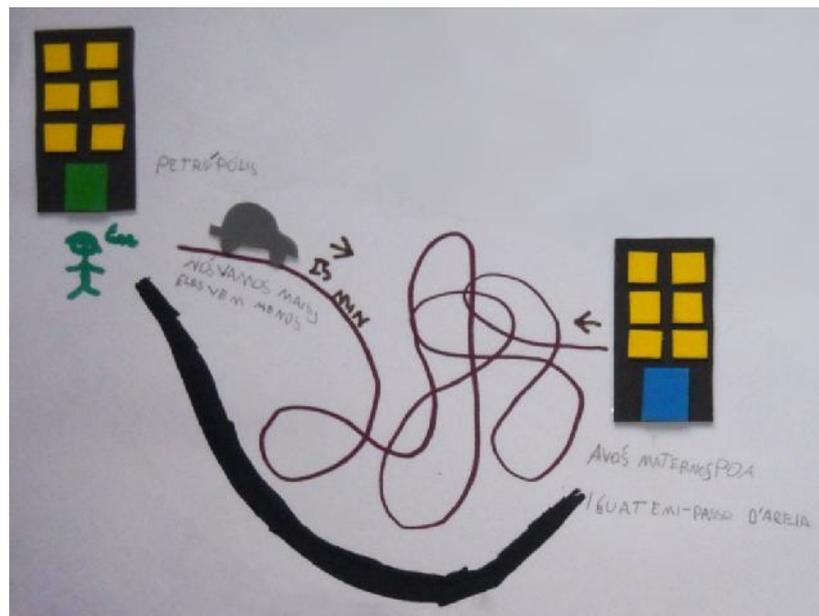


Fig. 336: Detail of Alex's map of his house and his grandparents', showing the regular contact between them.

care for her grandparents. She tells how, since her paternal grandmother fell sick, she has moved in with her aunt, as a way of receiving better care: "My granny is very sick and can't be alone. She sometimes gets upset and that's why she's with my auntie now", the girl says.

According to Karsch (2003), kinship, gender, geographical distance and emotional proximity are the most important factors in deciding who will be the family caregiver, a role



that mainly falls to women in their capacity as wives and daughters. As they live longer, women are not only the prime caregivers: they are also the ones who receive the most care, since this means that they are more likely to suffer from chronic diseases in old age (Veras, 2003). An interesting fact is that, according to a study carried out by Karsch (2003), on the epidemiology of caregivers in São Paulo, most of those who care for the elderly are in their fifties (59%) or sixties (42%), which means that there is a significant proportion of young elderly people who care for older elderly people. Attias-Donfut and Segalen (1998) also discovered this phenomenon in France, showing that the “sandwich generation”, with elderly parents and young grandchildren, tend to care simultaneously for both. “The most surprising thing”, these authors say, is that

[...] involvement with elderly parents is more important precisely for those who care more regularly for their grandchildren. [...] Men, like women, help their elderly parents more when they regularly care for small grandchildren (p. 72).

The children also notice this phenomenon. They see that, not only are their parents involved in caring for their grandparents, but that their grandparents are also involved in caring for their great-grandparents. It is like this for Felipe, who says that his grandmother rarely visits Porto Alegre “because she has to stay in Natal *caring for her mother, who is really sick, on death’s door*”, and for Melissa, who says that “she often visits [her] great-grandparents”, because they live above her paternal grandparents and her granny goes there when Melissa is in her care. She has Alzheimer’s and “is very physically healthy, except that this year, she has started to get bad, really bad”, the girl says. So, while her grandmother cares for her, she provides support for her own parents.

The words of these boys and girls show that the family is the great care-provider, in the case of both children and the elderly, and is the predominant source of domestic help. In Brazil, the 2003 *Study of the Elderly* outlines, in one of its guidelines, that care for the elderly should be carried out within the family “full-time care at a long-term care center will be provided when it has been ascertained that there is no family, no family home, the individual has been abandoned, or *the family lacks financial resources.*” (Ch. IX, Art. 37, § 1°). As the Brazilian state intervenes very little in social policy in the field of childcare and care for the elderly, “the family is the only resource left” (Peixoto, 2005, p.226). And when family members are unwilling, unprepared, or overloaded by this responsibility, care may be inadequate, insufficient or even non-existent, giving rise to a risk of abuse or mistreatment



(Caldas, 2003). Attias-Donfut and Segalen (1998) point out – as we saw in the section on childcare, in Chapter 3 –, that greater support from the state does not tend to suppress private support provided from one generation for another, but to change its configuration: care is undertaken on the basis of autonomy of the generations and not dependence on the family.

Most research on caregivers focuses on the role of the spouse or the children, overlooking the contribution of the grandchildren (Fruhauf, Jarrott and Allen, 2006), especially when they are children. It seems that it is always the older of these two generations that does the caring. However, the children show that they too are sources of support for their sick grandparents. In 2010, the US TV channel, ABC, aired a report on a child of three and a half who, while being looked after by a grandmother, rang 911 when she had a stroke and fell over, thereby saving her life (Appendix 9). In the present study, Alex reports caring for his grandmother, giving her hugs and kisses and fetching her water when she is thirsty; Betina\* says she helps her grandmother “to find her glasses” because she can’t see very well (See image below); André “gives [his] grandmother a massage, because she has a problem with her arm and it hurts sometimes” and Catarina, whose grandmother is practically blind, helps her to get about the house (See image below): “She can’t see, so she can only sit in the chair. She moves her hand, like this, when she wants something. It’s very sad to see that she can’t move. So, I help her get around the house and climb the stairs, because she can’t do this alone”. By caring for grandparents, the children train as caregivers in a relational dialogue that is transformed into a productive learning process.



Fig. 337: Betina\* showing her grandmother where her glasses are. The glasses are clearly visible on the table in the drawing.



Fig. 338: Catarina helping her grandmother, who can’t see well, to get around the house.



The children also help their grandparents to cope with disease through play. By playing, make transform painful and sad situations less unbearable and provide emotional support for the individual who is going through them. Fearn and Howard's study (2010) of the lives of children who live in conditions of extreme stress and deprivation – such as refugees from the air-strike in Beirut (in 2006), orphans in Ceausescu's Romania (in the 1980s), and Rio de Janeiro street children – show, for example, that they can control their emotions and reduce anxiety by playing. Play was a resource that the children used to organize their feels in the face of adversity, as can be also seen in the case of sick grandparents. According to Winnicott (1982), “children [also] play to overcome anxiety, control ideas or impulses that lead to anxiety, if these have not been dominated” (p.162).

Catarina, for example, helps her grandmother playing *Old People's Home* with her cousin: “As my granny can't do anything, because she can't see very well, we do the washing up, make juice for her... and my cousin and I play... we cook sometimes, set the table and look after her. We pretend that we run an old people's home”. The grandmother, who lives in this “rest home”, is cared for by her most loyal helpers, who are only nine years old. Melissa says that she plays “in her great-grandfather's wheelchair: “I wheel around his house... I love it! I'm already an expert and he thinks it's funny!” the girl says. Nanda plays doctors with her cousin and her grandmother, as she herself beautifully recounts:

Nanda – My granny has lots of things wrong with her, she has a bad back, problems with her wrist... She has lots of problems! Not just one, thousands!!! Two thousand and one problems!!! So, sometimes, *my cousin and I play doctors and we help my granny*, because she has all these problems. Sometimes we ask what she is feeling; sometimes we do her hair up; sometimes we get a bandage my cousin has and we bandage her arm to treat her wrist. My granny also has a very good skin cream! So we use this cream to give her a massage and she gets a bit better.

So, just as grandparents once cared for their grandchildren, now the grandchildren also care for their grandparents: “Sometimes, the grandparents forget what they are doing and *the children help them*, to do what they have to be... *We can help them*, by doing what they ask us. *We can help!* If she wants a glass of water we can fetch one, we can bring her her slippers...” (José). And just as the grandparents give them “homemade remedies when I have a virus” (Luck), “give me water, sugar, and salt when I'm not feeling well” (Carol), “help me to take a bath, wrapping my foot in a bag when I had a plaster cast on so as not to get it



wet” (Fernanda), “look after me when I have a fever” (Luca) or “put a plaster on when I hurt myself” (Alexandra), so the children can reciprocate this by caring for them:

Jaqueline – The other day, my granny and I were at home and I helped her. She went to keep the dogs apart, because they were fighting and one of them bit her. I pulled up her sleeve. And when I saw the wound, I called a taxi to rush her to hospital. And since then I’ve been putting a plaster on it.

But, living with a sick grandparent is not always easy for the children. Natasha recounts, movingly, how seeing her grandmother sick is one of the saddest things:

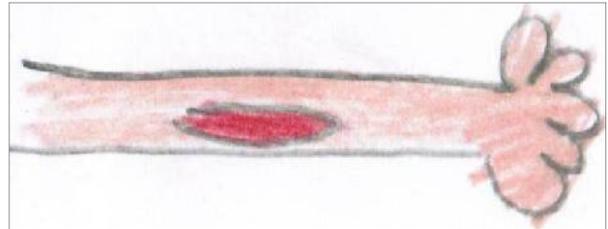


Fig. 339: Jaqueline’s drawing: “I put a plaster on my granny”.



Fig. 340: Natasha’s drawing: “When granny got sick and I visited her in hospital”.

Natasha – Here I’ve drawn [See drawing on the left] when my granny was in the hospital and I went to visit her for the first time. Except that now it’s going to start all over again, because the cancer is back. It was at the front and now it’s at the back. I got very sad because *I was lying awake thinking that she was going to die, and I was so sad I couldn’t sleep*. Now I’m getting sad again, but I’m not as sad as I was the first time, because now I know what it’s like. I am sad because I see my mum is so sad about everything that is going on, but my granny told me that she has breast cancer and that she has to fight it... if she gives in, she can’t win! And I want to help my granny!

Adriana has also been through a difficult time, when her grandpa had a stroke during the period Adriana was taking part in the research. The girl’s words show how

finding out about the disease provoked strong feelings in her:

Adriana – I just kept... I just kept thinking... and wondering if my grandpa would suffer. I just listened to people speaking... and then my mother told me that he wouldn’t be able to walk again.

[...]

Adriana – Can I tell you something? I was wondering what it is going to be like for me without my grandpa, for my cousin and I... I would certainly cry a lot if I saw my grandpa dead, because *it would be a great loss! It’s so good having a grandpa that it makes me sad...* [her eyes fill with tears and she takes a deep breath]... it makes me so sad *not being able to see him, to lose him*.



Adriana knows that her grandfather will not be able to walk again, and, along with her parents and her grandmother, is preparing herself for this new phase:

Adriana – We are going to sell his car, because he won't be able to drive again... now he's going to depend on his children to drive him about! And now, we're going to have to re-arrange our room, because my grandpa is coming home from hospital, but he can't walk; so we're going to have to re-arrange it... for grandpa to sleep in, because now my grandpa is going to have to sleep with a nurse at his side to look after him.

"But when you grow up, you'll be able to help him!" Érica says, in an effort to console her friend. "*I can already help him with lots of things!*" the girl says: "I can fetch him the paper to read, I can hold it for him, I can look after his orchid collection... I dreamt about him, and, in the dream he was playing with me, he was walking. Now I keep thinking that he won't be able to do that. I cry. My granny cries too", she says.

While her grandfather was in the ICU and Adriana couldn't see him, her father recorded a video for her and her cousin as a way of providing some communication between these two generations: "He said that he adores me, that he loves me", Adriana says, choking with emotion. The bond with her sick grandfather was important for her, but it was also important for him, who wanted to leave a record of his affection for her. The same happened with Alexandre: "Do you know what the best memory is I have of my grandpa? It was when once, before he died, when he was really sick, with a serious problem with his heart, *but even so he wanted to play with me... He couldn't, but even so he insisted on playing with me!*", the boy recounts, his voice filled with emotion. Adriana has said that her grandfather's illness has made her feel fear: "It scares me... *we are scared of losing our grandparents*, because they are so great! So I'm scared of never seeing my grandfather again!".

Spending time with their grandparents puts the children in contact with the ageing process, so that they know not only what it means to be born and grow up, but also what it means to grow old and fragile (Keck & Saraceno, 2009). "For the child, crossing the road to buy a croissant and coming back is nothing, but for the grandmother, she has to get dressed, go down the stairs, go out – worried about the weather –, and then climb the stairs again! It's a little adventure! [...] This teaches the children about the meaning of life", Dolto (1998b, p.187), the French psychoanalyst says, understanding that life takes its course and leaves its marks on all of us. We are fragile and finite beings, and the death of a loved one,



the natural, universal and inevitable condition of all human beings (Torres, 1999), is an event that has as strong an impact on the family group as birth itself.

#### 5.4 On Finitude

*“Granny, you never said that you wanted to go away like this, without saying goodbye.  
Granny, this isn’t what we agreed.  
Granny, where are your promises? Granny, where are our trips?  
Granny Vivi, what about the fun we were going to have?  
And our companionship? And my secrets, granny? Where have you taken them?  
And how am I going to grow up without you seeing me?  
How am I going to go out into a world without you in it?  
Granny, I can no longer hug your knees,  
I can no longer kiss your face, I can no longer hold your hand...  
Granny, how hard it is! Granny Vivi, what pain!”*

**Ziraldo (Menina Nina, 2008)**

So the time comes when life comes to an end, and the fun and the affection, and the trips and promises, as Ziraldo so movingly puts in the mouth of Nina (2008), are a thing of the past. Dealing with the finitude of their grandparents can be as painful for the children as it is for the rest of the family. When the grandparents were close to them, the children are sorry that they can no longer hug them, hear their voice, have them by their side: they have lost a companion, a family member, and a friend. “It is sad, because I can’t touch them anymore, I can only dream about them”, Catarina says of her dead grandparents. “I remember once I dreamt that my two grandfathers were building a bonfire, when I was camping with my father. It was so good to dream about them! It was as if they were there! I had never dreamt about them before!” the girl recounts.

The loss of a grandfather is especially strongly felt by those children who had the opportunity to spend time with him. They sadly remember the times when “grandpa sat at my side and taught me so many things” (Alexandre), “the cake my granny used to make” (Betina), “the stories grandpa told us” (Betina) or “the cookie pot she had in the cupboard” (João): “When I used to go to her house, she would always give me cookies. She took the pot and asked me, ‘Would you like one?’ She did all that the days I used to go there. Every time I went there. It’s what I most remember about my granny. She was good to me!” João says. Some children also are sorry that they never knew their grandparents, never had the opportunity to spend time with them, but those who did know them, live with the loss,



bathed in the memories of the times they shared together. As Élis\* shows in the text cited below. This boy, of *just* nine, recounts, in minute detail, his childhood memories of his grandmothers, who have now passed away:

Élis – When I was born, I only had my two grandmothers, my mother’s mother, who was called Cila, and my father’s mother, who was called Odette. I saw my granny Cila every day, because she lived across the road. My granny Odette lived in another neighborhood and, so I only saw her at the weekend. Whenever my parents went out at night, I would sleep over at Granny Cila’s. When I slept there, my granny would push the bed up against the wall so I didn’t fall out, and she would always make me pee before I went to sleep so I wouldn’t wet the bed. Once, when I was four, I had conjunctivitis, and spent two weeks at Granny Odette’s, because I couldn’t go to the crèche. When I was there, she made all the food I like best. I adored both of them. They were great! One of them, Granny Odette, always gave me presents, and Granny Cila made blancmange and lovely pies that I loved! Now I am nine. I’ll be ten in three months. When I was six, I lost Granny Odette, and now I am nine, I have also lost Granny Cila. I MISS THEM SO MUCH! [uppercase in the original]

Deceased grandparents do not only appear in the texts and words of the children included in the study. In their drawings of their grandparents, many also included dead grandparents. Some wanted to register the presence of someone they knew and spent time with when they were younger; others the presence of someone who they would have liked to have known, a grandfather or grandmother whom they only know from photograph or stories told by older members of the family. In the children’s drawings, the dead grandparents normally appear after the living ones, on the far right of the picture, as we can see in the drawings reproduced here.



Fig. 341: Amanda’s drawing: On the left, her maternal grandparents, still alive; on the right, her paternal grandparents, deceased. “These are still my grandparents. They are still important to me”, says Amanda, who, of her deceased grandparents, only knew her paternal grandfather, who died in 2009. She has seen her paternal grandmother in photos.

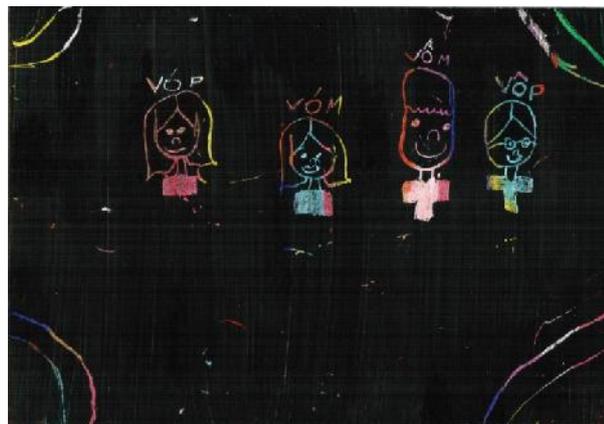


Fig. 342: Nicol­le’s drawing: the first three figures are her surviving grandparents. Note that her deceased paternal grandfather was drawn last, a long way away from her paternal grandmother, whom she drew first. “I never met my paternal grandfather, because he died a month before I was born... I drew him because I miss having a grandfather”, she says.



Fig. 343: Fernando's drawing: This boy, who has no contact with his father's side of the family, drew himself, his maternal grandmother, who is still alive and, on the right, "his grandfather who has died", as he writes on the page. "I never knew him, but I would like to have", Fernando says.



Fig. 344: Catarina's drawing: On the left, her living grandparents. On the right, her deceased grandparents, whom she knew when she "was really little". For this reason, they are not represented as couples, as the other children do.

When the children do not include their grandparents, it is because they do not consider dead people to be direct family members, or, because they had almost no contact with this family member: "I didn't draw my grandfathers, because they have already been dead a long time", Luca says; "I never knew him", Alexandre says; "I don't know what they were like"; Nanda explains; "I've never even seen a photo of them", Alice says; "I can't remember them very well", Jaqueline concludes. However, this does not mean that they are not important people: "They may have helped when you were little, but you can't remember", Alice says. "They are our parents' parents" (Amanda) and "even when they're dead, they're still our grandparents" (Jaqueline).

The death of a grandparent or a great-grandparent is "something sad, because my great-grandfather died and I hadn't even been born, and *the people with him were sad*", Gabriella says. "My grandfather is my father's father, and even though I don't know him, when he died, my father must have been very sad and missed him a lot!" says José, who shows, in the image on the right, his father crying at his grandfather's grave, saying, "Father, I shall never



Fig. 345: José's drawing: He as a baby in the lap of his father at the funeral of his grandfather.



forget you". In his arms is José as a baby, who can see he is suffering. Thus, although the death of a grandfather they have never met does not move them directly, it may sadden them to think of the suffering of the people who were close to them: "I was only two years old when my grandparents died. I don't remember, but my sister told me that *it was the only time she saw our father cry. That makes me sad*", Betina says.

The memories the children have of their grandparents also depend on the age they were when they passed away and the degree of intimacy between them. As Kornhaber and Woodward (1985) remark, those who have not had a close relationship do not lament its loss, "for the simple fact that we can only lose something that we possess." (Messy in Py, 2004, p.121). Or as Morin (1970) puts it, "the pain caused by a death only exists if the dead person has been present and recognized as an individual" (p.71). Thus, Nanda reports that "losing her great-grandmother and her maternal grandparents is not a sad memory, but it was sad to know that my great-aunt had died and when my twelve-year-old fish died. My great-aunt used to ask me to talk to her *and I remember her very well*". Luck tells a similar story: "A sad memory for me was when my uncle and my great-grandmother died. Except I don't really remember my great-grandmother, because I was young, but, when my uncle died, *that was the first time I really felt it*. I was at the funeral and I cried a lot when they closed the coffin. I was about nine or ten. It wasn't that long ago". This is also why Leonardo, even though both his grandfathers are dead, and Alice, even though she only has one grandmother alive, say they have no sad memories regarding their grandparents, as we can see from what they have written.

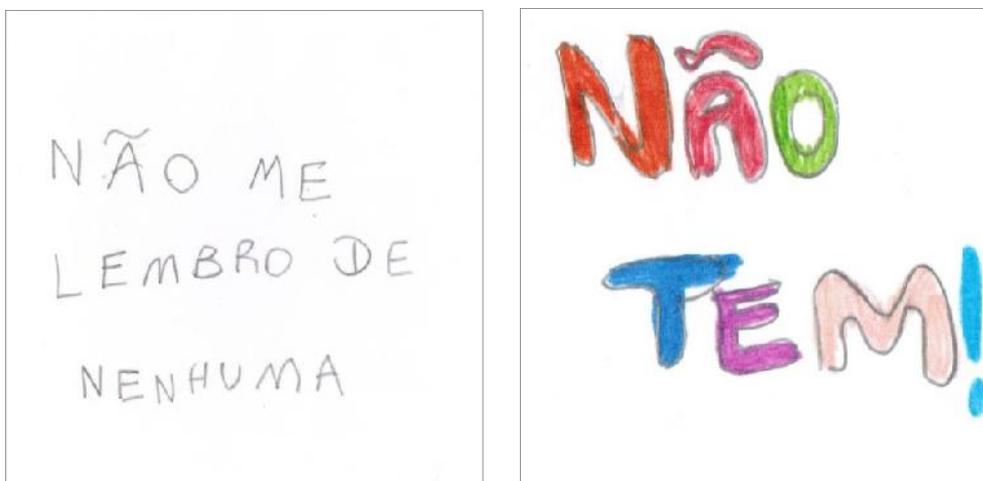


Fig.346: From left to right: Text written by Leonardo (I don't remember any) and Alice (There is not) for the "Sad Memory" item.



However, when the two generations have been close, the children show signs of having suffered the impact of the loss: “the closer, the more loved and respected, that is, the more ‘unique’, the deceased was, the greater the pain.” (Morin, 1970, p.31). This is perhaps why Alexandre, who was in touch with his maternal grandfather until he was seven, has drawn himself so close to him. In his drawing, we can see, not only that they look alike, but that the grandfather is giving his grandson a big hug. Alexandre gives an emotional account of his grandfather’s death; a grandfather, who as he himself says, “marked him for life”.



Fig. 347: Alexandre’s drawing of himself with his deceased maternal grandfather.

Alexandre – My grandfather died in 2007. He was sick for two years and then he died. I was seven. I remember it well! When my grandpa died, I was off school for a week... He lived in Veranópolis and my mum took time off work. This was my worst week... We didn’t speak. We cried over lunch. We cried over our tea. We cried when we went to bed. Whatever we were doing, we cried... When my mother told me, I was very sad, but I didn’t cry. I was still little and I thought... I had some friends in the building who said that crying was for little girls, so I held it in when my mum told me. But at the funeral, I couldn’t hold it in anymore, because everyone was crying [...] When they showed my grandpa’s body, we were in this kind of VIP suite where there were chairs for the family. Then I cried and cried and cried... My father took me into the garden to play a bit, but when I came back, I couldn’t stop crying... and when they closed the coffin, I broke down in tears!

Although Alexandre describes his grandfather’s wake with such intense emotion, the chance to bid farewell to a loved one is

remembered by many children as something they are normally deprived of. Children are often not allowed in hospitals and funerals are not considered appropriate places for them. According to Ariès (2009), our deaths are silent, forbidden, hidden, terrifying and alone: a “savage kind of death”. Death, which, in the past, was “domesticated” and took place at home, has become institutionalized, and set apart from the living. With advances in medical science, it has become something technical that takes place in specialized settings, and normally occurs as a result of the suspension of medical procedures: “we die in hospital because hospital has become the place that offers cures that can no longer be provided at home” (Ariès, 2009, p.69).



Improvements in the quality of life, medical developments, and increased life expectancy have also contributed to keeping death at a distance, whereas, in former times, plagues, wars and precarious health care had ensured that death was a common occurrence<sup>64</sup> which could come to people of all ages: “[...] nowadays, the spectacle of the dying is no longer an everyday thing and people can easily forget about it in the course of their normal everyday lives” (Elias, 1987, p.7). However, although death is more distant from our private experience, it is also more present in the mass communications media which bring news of great catastrophes, murders and road accidents (Doll & Py, 2007). These authors also remind us that death is a constant feature of the films, TV shows, songs and video-games that take up a large part of children’s leisure time.

Elias (1987) reports that this privatization of death has had an effect on the participation of children in wakes and family funerals: “[...] nowadays, adults are afraid to confront children with death. [...] on the grounds of the dubious hypothesis that this may harm them and they hide from them simple facts of life that they will inevitably have to find out about and learn to deal with” (p.18). Ariès (2009) also tells how French children “no longer attend their grandparents’ funerals: old people, often grandparents, are put to rest by adults, who are more embarrassed and pressed for time than moved, without any grandchild being present” (p.211). For many children, not being able to bid farewell to “someone who was very important to you and who liked you a lot” (Carol) is a right that is denied them.

“When my step-mother’s father died, I was very sad”, Daniele says, “and no-one let me go to his funeral. I was already seven years old and I wanted to go and say goodbye to him and thank him for our times together! But no-one let me go!”. Fernanda tells a similar story: “When my grandpa died, I cried a lot, but I couldn’t go to the funeral, because they said children couldn’t go”. “Adults don’t let us go!” Diego exclaims. “When my [maternal] great-grandfather died I was with my father, so I didn’t go, but it would have been the same if I had been with my mother!” (Diego). The same happened to Yasmin:

Yasmin – When my uncle’s mother died, who was my adopted granny, they didn’t let me go to her funeral. I was six or seven. I liked her so much. I wanted to go to thank her for having taught me so many things. She was always so kind and good to me. I used to go there all the time to watch TV, play with her and fight with the

<sup>64</sup> However, this does not mean that people found it easier to deal with death; just that they had more experience of it.



dogs. But they wouldn't let me go. Adults are a real bore! I wanted to say goodbye!  
It's not fair!

According to Dolto, "the conspiracy of silence over these things that are so important for children proves that they are not respected and do not form part of the family" (Dolto, 1998b p.197), that they are not listened to. According to this French psychoanalyst, a funeral integrates children socially, and allows them to be recognized as human: a desiring human being, who, as such, is free from the chronological ties of time. "There's no such thing as age", Dolto (1999c, p.60) tells us, "a subject is as old as his or her desire, and we don't often acknowledge this" (p.61). Kübler-Ross (1997) also underline the importance of funerary rites. It is in the presence of the deceased that the living have a chance to formally say goodbye, where friends and family have an opportunity to get together and bid a collective farewell to the loved one, establishing a rite of passage between that which came before that which remains after death.

It is a chance for those who were not able to participate in a final illness and care to join with those who had this privilege. It also means the arrival of friends and relatives long not seen – to catch up on memories, to know we are not alone in our pain and loss, to reunite with shattered family members, and last but not least, to publicly share the meaning of the life of the person who has left, the meaning it gave to our lives. It is a thank-you, a tribute, a public sharing of grief and pain, of consolation and hope." (Kübler-Ross, 1997, p.197).

"Adults don't understand children", Daniele explains, "we want to go, we also want to say goodbye". "I think it's important", says João, "because, if a person was important for you, I think you should go, because it was a person who loved you a lot and we have to wish that person luck in heaven", he explains. "I think we should go", Ashley says, "I wanted to go to my great-grandmother's funeral and they let me. I said goodbye to her. It was sad, but I wanted to see her one last time".

Seeing dead grandparents is not necessarily something easy for children, or adults, for that matter. If, on the one hand, they are sad, cry, experience a moment of family mourning, on the other, if they do not cry at the time "it only makes it difficult to cry alone and to live without the person afterwards", Lucas says. "I think you should go! It's the last time that you see that person before they're sealed in the coffin, and we need to remember" he says. "It's sad to see your grandfather all white, with that smell of the dead" (Alexandre), "without a soul" (João), but "crying a bit helps you get over it. You go home, cry a bit and, after a few days, you are over it. You cry and you are over it", Yasmin reflects.



According to McGoldrick and Walsh (2004), it is important that adults do not exclude children from a shared experience of loss, in an effort to spare them pain: the death of a grandfather in childhood is probably the first opportunity children have to deal with it.<sup>65</sup> With their parents, the children learn to deal with the loss and see how this is part of family life. “Births, marriages, life, death, all the questions that these raise, all the words exchanged during these emotional times for families form the basis of human intelligence”, Dolto (1998b, p.197) argues.

For the children, grandparents do not disappear when they die. The “reality” of the grandparent continues to live within them, immortalized in their hearts and minds (Kornhaber & Woodward, 1985). The dead grandparent remains in the midst of the living, is celebrated by memories in the time of the living, in photographs and other objects. “There are a thousand such objects, but the combination is unique. [...] [They] become points of reference for everyday decoration; conjure up memories of family holidays, stages in the cycle of family and working life” (Segalen, 1999, p.234). The objects bear the essence of the dead grandparent.

“Do you know what I most remember about Grandma Elma? That she always made bean stew! My other granny makes bean stew, but it’s not the same! The smell’s the same, but the taste is nothing like it”, Yasmin explains, and draws herself eating bean stew with her deceased grandmother (Fig. 348). “For me, it’s honey”, says Daniele, “because my step-mother’s father used to make honey. So, every time I see



Fig. 348: Yasmin’s drawing. “An unforgettable taste”: her dead granny’s bean stew.



Fig. 349: Daniele’s drawing. “I can’t bear the smell of honey because it reminds me of my grandpa”.

<sup>65</sup> Torres (1996) shows that children learn to deal with “being” and “not being” when they are still babies, in the game of *peek-a-boo*; Dolto (1999b) remarks that children learn about the concept of death, as immobility, when they crush a fly or lose a pet, but the death of a family member is a process that involves the whole family and a person who is irreplaceable.



honey, I miss him. I see honey and I remember him". Milene\*, who lost her paternal grandfather a few months before the research meetings, remembers the cane he used to use: "He was two grandpas in one", says the girl, who never knew her maternal grandfather. João remembers what his grandmother looked like, "with really long hair" and Rodrigo\* remembers the house: "My maternal granny had a big really great house, which became a language school that teaches Spanish, French, English, Japanese, Chinese, Russian and lots of other languages. I remember this house well, because I used to go there often and slept there sometimes", he says.



Fig. 350: Milene's\* drawing. Memory-object: the cane her grandfather used to use.

Deceased grandparents are also still present in photographs. Through these, children can see what grandparents they have never met looked like, relive the moments they capture and reconstruct

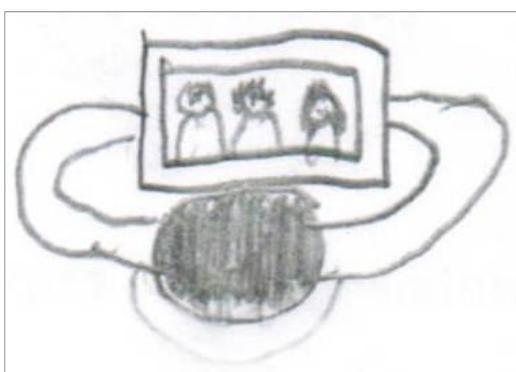


Fig. 351: Matheus's\* drawing. "A photo of my grandparents".

their past in their imagination. "On the shelves in the living room, there's a photo of my granny that my father put there to show that she is in heaven, but is still important for us", Betina says. For Guilherme\*, Jaqueline and Hernan\*, the photographs bring back things that they can no longer share with their grandparents. They represent, as Sontag reminds us, "the indirect presence of scattered relatives" (Sontag, 2008, p.19), a "pseudo- presence and a mark of absence" (Sontag, 2008, p.25).



Fig. 352: Guilherme's\* drawing: "A photo of my granny who died".



Fig. 353: Jaqueline's drawing: "It is sad that I only know my grandfather from a photo".

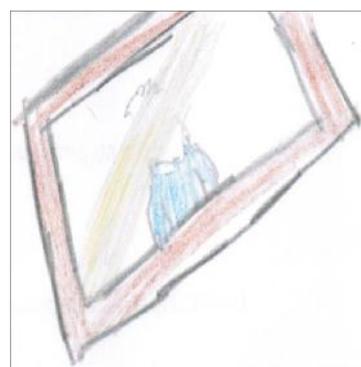


Fig. 354: Hernan's\* drawing: "A photo of my grandfather".



“Do you know what this drawing is?”, Kátia asked me about the image below on the right. “A photo of my great-grandmother who I never met. When I think of her, it makes me sad and I miss her, because, I would have liked to have known what she was like... My mum dreamt about her once, when she was pregnant with me, and gave me her name. I got my name from my great-grandmother. So, I’ve drawn her here when she was my age”, the girl says. Kátia portrays her great-grandmother as a child, great-grandmother who plays, runs about and rolls in the green grass of the photograph. A great-grandmother who, like



Fig. 355: “A photo of my great-grandmother Kátia, when she was little”.



Fig. 356: Picture of *Bisa Bia*, from the book *Bisa Bia, Bisa Bel*.

*Bisa Bia*, the character in the classic children’s book written by Ana Maria Machado in the

early 1980s<sup>66</sup>, would like her great-grand-daughter to know her better. In this story, the great-grand-daughter Isabel finds a portrait of her great-grandmother as a child (See image on the right) and, enchanted by “this beautiful girl with curly hair” (Machado, 2001, p.9), asks her mother if she can keep the photo. But her mother replies, “No you can’t my dear. Why do you want that? *You didn’t even know your great-grandmother...*” So Isabel says, “*That’s precisely why, so that I can get to know her.* Take her to school, to the square, out on

the street, everywhere.” (Machado, 2001, p.10). Isabel’s desire appears to be similar to that of Kátia: they want to get to know their ancestors better.

In Ana Maria Machado’s story, the mother lends the photo to the great-grand-daughter, who has talked with her great-grandmother so much that they have become friends. The “child in the photo” and the “real child” have great adventures together. They tell stories, eat junk and play together. While Isabel runs, her great-grandmother is tucked away under her shirt:

<sup>66</sup> *Bisa Bia, Bisa Bel* (Machado, 2001), won various awards, such as the *Jabuti Prize*, *The 40 Essential Books* and the *Americas Award for Children’s and Young Adult Literature*.



- Mummy, something really amazing has happened. Bisa Bia likes me so much, she likes my school, she likes my friends, my bedroom, everything about me. Now she wants to move in with me.

[...]

- I kept her close to my heart, in the best place I had. And she liked it so much – mummy – that she wanted to stay there forever, *except on the inside*. It was easy too, because I had been running and was sweating a lot and the portrait got wet and stuck to me. Like a tattoo. Painted on my skin. But no-one can see. Like a transparent or invisible tattoo.

[...]

- Then she went inside me, mummy. A tattoo on the inside, invisible and transparent in my heart. *Now Bisa Bia is really living with me. Deep inside... Living with me forever.* (Machado, 2001, p.21)

I cite at length from the book to show how Isabel bonded with a great-grandmother she had never met, through a link that united them deep inside, like a transparent and invisible tattoo, that only feelings can see. This is the kind of bond that many of children in this study say they have with their forebears: “Every night, everybody says that your grandparents still bless you, even when they have passed away. They say that they protect you from anything that can happen to you”, Alice says. “They are like guardian angels, who tells us which path to take, so we don’t stray. They help us throughout our lives”. “They are with us”, says Jaqueline, “not in person, but they are with us. They look down on us from another place”. “Their soul sees us”, Melissa says, “because they see that their children are all grown up and have children of their own, who themselves have children. And this is really important for a great-grandparent or a grandparent. They like us because we are an extension of them”. Alice also remarks that she talks to her ancestors, much like Isabel in *Bisa Bia, Bisa Bel*: “when I am alone and I want to talk, I talk with the grandparents I never knew”, she says. “And I pray to my grandparents who have died. I ask them to help me throughout my life”. “I think of them”, says Jaqueline, “I feel that they are with me, inside, looking down on me”.

“Heaven is the place where the souls of grandparents go when they die”, João explains. “My grandfather lives in heaven”, Alexandre writes on the back of his drawing. This may be why Daniele has drawn her grandfather with a halo above his head and the wings of an angel. The body remains on earth and many children, in their drawings and writings, indicate that they too would like to go to the



Fig. 357: Drawing by Daniele: His grandfather, with wings and a halo, hovering above the ground.



cemetery, to put things on their grandparents' graves: "I've never been to a cemetery", says Carol. "I've only passed by", says Kátia. "Every year, we go to mass to pray for my granny and my father goes to the cemetery to leave a rose for her", Betina says. "But he won't let me go. He says a witch will get me if I go. When I was really little, this scared me, but now I say 'Daddy! Witches don't exist!' And he says 'Oh yes they do, they come out of coffins!'". Although many children are not allowed to visit cemeteries or attend funerals, a large number of them drew themselves at the side of their dead grandparents' and great-grandparents' graves.



Fig. 358: Diego's drawing: He was not allowed to attend his great-grandfather's funeral but depicts himself here visiting his grave.



Fig. 359: Yasmin's drawing: She was not allowed to attend her grandmother's funeral, but depicts herself here laying flowers on her grave.



Fig. 360: Ashley's drawing: On the day of her great-grandmother's funeral.

The children depict themselves praying, an act they often had learnt with their grandparents, as we saw in the last chapter.



Fig. 361: Fernanda's drawing: She could not go to her grandfather's funeral, but depicts herself praying at his graveside.



Fig. 362: Betina's drawing: She is not allowed to go to the cemetery, but here takes a flower for her paternal grandparents. Rain falls from the sky as she cries.



Fig. 363: Fernando's drawing: He prays at the graveside of the maternal grandfather he never knew.



According to Kornhaber and Woodward (1985), “cemeteries are not only final ‘resting places’ for ancestors, they are also important ‘feeling places’” (p.170), where the generations can share their emotions. This is why Nycolle says that, when she goes to Minas Gerais, she always asks her father to take her to visit her grandfather’s grave: “There’s a photo on the headstone and I always want to *visit him*”, the girl says. Alexandre also *visits* his grandfather in his new home: “Once there were drug dealers in the cemetery and I had go another year *without seeing my grandpa*; I went more than a year *without visiting him*, because the police and the drug dealers were fighting”. For Mariana\*, the cemetery is also a place full of memories for family gatherings: “When my family goes to lay flowers on the grave of my great-grandmother, we remember her and all the things we went through together”, the girl says. Her drawing is of a grave bedecked with flowers with photos of her great-grandparents smiling.



Fig. 364: Mariana’s\* drawing, the grave where her great-grandmother is buried.

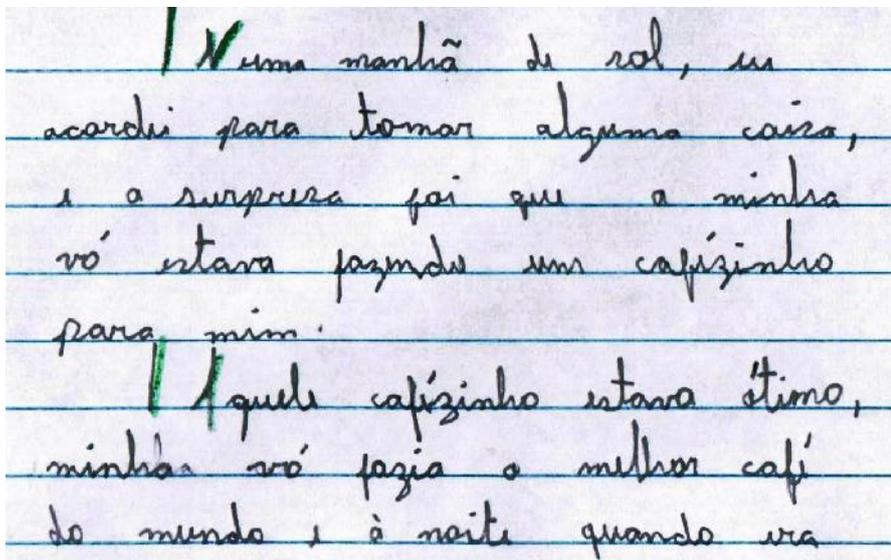
According to Attias-Donfut and Segalen (2002), our “ancestors are dead people who are necessary for us. They signify ‘what has come before’, the people who are at ‘the origins of the family from which we are descended’” (p. 293). When they are people who were present in the lives of both children and parents – hence the importance of not losing touch after separations or divorces in the second or the third generation –, they remain alive within us: in memories and family stories and in “feeling memories” (Kornhaber & Woodward, 1985, p.43). These are memories of profound experiences of mortality that invite us:

[...] to look after ourselves, what remains of us, [what was] so forgotten so that we can care for others, because it is the outward mark of our failure in this task and our powerlessness in the face of something inevitable (PAGNI, 2010, p.67).



Memories of the times we spent together at home, of the first steps we took at our grandmother's knee, the help they gave us with our homework, the times they looked after us, the things we grew in the garden, the day grandpa taught us to ride a bike without stabilizers, the holidays, jumping around on the bed, the cake coming hot out of the oven, the sewing and scrap-booking, the hiding-place behind the bathroom door, the secrets shared, the smell that only our grandmother had, the noise of a cane banging around the house, the arguments, the times of sickness, and the stories they told. "Life has no meaning, if we know not what death means" (Dolto, 1998b, p.196).

Through grandparents, children learn something about the reality of the world not only before they were born, but before their parents were born. [...] Children can imagine a real world to which no-one they know belongs and can thus also begin to think about an abundant — albeit as yet unknown — future that stretches out beyond the lives of the children they will one day produce and the lives of their children's children. The experience of the past provides them with the means to imagine the future [...] Through their grandparents, children learn about the whole cycle of life — what it means to have grown-up children, to have lived one's whole life, to have accomplished the tasks one sets oneself and to have grown old [...] From the words and the hands of grandparents, grandchildren learn about the end of life at its very beginning." (Mead & Heyman, 1965, in Lins de Barros, 1987, p.122).<sup>67</sup>



<sup>67</sup> The following is a translation of a text written by a Brazilian child: "One sunny morning, I woke up to get something and, to my surprise, granny was making me coffee. The coffee was great. My granny makes the best coffee in the world and, at night, when I was a baby, my granny would stay up at night feeding me with a bottle and when I had finished I would fall asleep. The other day was my granny's birthday and I had a lovely day and my granny did too and the present that I gave her was all my love. My granny used to teach me to pray and ask for peace, love, and happiness and she would ask for the same thing and I liked that. I loved the things my granny did for me, but now she is in heaven and I miss her down here."



belô, minha vô ficava à noite fazendo mamadeira e quando terminava de tomar eu caia no sono.

No outro dia era dia de aniversário da minha vô e esse dia eu amava e minha vô também, porque presente que eu dava para ela era o

Minha vô ensinava a fazer oração e eu pedia que ela tivesse paz, amor e felicidade e ela pedia a mesma coisa e eu gostava muito disso.

As coisas que a minha vô fazia para mim eu adorava mas, agora que ela está lá no céu, eu estou sentindo falta dela aqui em baixo.

(Guilherme\*)

## *Final Considerations:*

### *What can we learn from this experience?*

As a way of outlining the findings of this thesis, I would like to offer some final reflections. The aim of this exploratory study was to find out more about the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren from the children's point of view, which led us to examine various facets of this relationship. These various facets are inter-related and address the relationship from different perspectives. This relationship is mediated by the family, an institution that is constantly changing, which through its actions, its break-ups, re-arrangements and conflicts, sets intergenerational relationships in motion. Although each family group organizes itself in a specific way and builds up its own history, there are nevertheless similarities, and this study sought to trace these.

The children's statements reveal that, there is, in intergenerational relations, a strong preference for the mother's side of the family and this was clear in all the family groups studied. Nuclear families have more evenly balanced contact with both sides of the family, since both the mother and the father are present to establish these links. Parents and grandparents from both sides of the family are present in the children's drawings, which shows that these individuals are recognized as members of the family. In cases of divorce, the pattern tends to be re-arranged, since the parent who does not have custody – normally the father – tends to have less contact with the child. Geographical distances also increase, which puts even greater strain on this relationship. As the middle generation plays an important role in establishing intergenerational contact, meetings with the grandparents on the side of the family of the parent who does not have custody – usually the paternal grandparents – become less frequent and sometimes relations completely break down. In these cases, the children may not recognize the generational role of their grandparents and they therefore do not appear in their drawings.

If, on the one hand, ties with the side of the family of the parent who does not have custody tend to weaken, on the other, those with the grandparents on the side of the family that does – usually the mother's – tend to grow stronger. In single-parent families, the grandparents appear as an important source of support, providing assistance mainly for the daughter with regard to child care. Female solidarity regarding childcare is a particularly



strong phenomenon. With the support they offer, the grandparents allow the second generation to continue to work or study, and, when relations between mothers- and daughters-in-law are good, they too may exchange support, which ensures that contact with the father's side of the family is not lost.

The support provided by grandparents for single-parent families may also take the form of temporary or permanent (re-)cohabitation, especially on the mother's side. Most of the children who live with their grandparents in the same household live with their mother, and, with growing numbers of divorces in the third generation and the feminization of old age, many of them live in households that are dominated by women. However, the children revealed that the roles assumed by these women in the home are not necessarily identical. Although grandmothers (and some grandfathers) take care of their grandchildren, and, in many cases provide financial support, the "disciplinary role" tends to fall more to the parents. The grandparents invest in their grandchildren and use their position as adults to socialize and educate the children, and not much difference was observed between grandparents who live with their grandchildren and those who do not in this regard. The children show that, even when they live under the same roof as their grandparents, the latter are more "partners in crime" and the activities they engage in are not necessarily acceptable to the parents. In other words, although they help to bring up the children, grandparents seem not to have lost – at least in the eyes of the children themselves – their role as grandparents.

Grandparents who live with their grandchildren are also great companions for them. They share many secrets and this relationship seems to rest on spending a lot of time together and much interaction. They are considered to be part of the more restricted family, as grandparents who do not live with them are not, a feature that was also observed in other family groups. Normally, grandparents are not considered to be members of the direct family and they do not therefore tend to appear in drawings of the family; but when the relationship is especially strong, they may be accepted as members of the more restricted family and the boundaries between households may become blurred. With whom does a child live with, if he or she spends all day at their grandparents' and only returns home to their parents at night?



Grandparents who live with their grandchildren or who take care of them regularly are usually the children's favorite grandparent, which shows the importance of the time spent together in determining preferences. As children usually live with their maternal grandparents, most of the caregivers come from the mother's side of the family; and, since personal and telephone contact are also more frequent on this side of the family (since women tend to bring the generations together), most of the children tend to have a preference for grandparents on the mother's side. These grandparents loom large in the children's lives. Regular contact and care are seen by the children as important factors and they often describe their grandmothers as a "second mother". It is the grandmothers who mostly help with homework, housework, and medical care and who read to the children at bedtime. Grandfathers are less involved in intergenerational care, but a tendency was observed for these to get involved more, usually outside home, helping with activities, such as dropping the children off at school and picking them up and accompanying them in more energetic and dangerous games.

However, preferences may also come from afar. Greater geographical proximity is not synonymous with a good relationship, since various variables, including the personality and lifestyle of the grandparents, determine the quality of relations. Children may be geographically distant from their grandparents, but emotionally close, or geographically close and emotionally distant. New technology has proved to be an important resource in keeping these relationships alive and overcoming distance. With the *webcam*, grandchildren can not only talk with their grandparents, but receive them and be received by them as virtual visitors. Contact via Orkut, MSN and the telephone is also mentioned by the children, and although many grandparents have difficulty using the new technology, it would seem that most of them manage to use it. Thus, although some grandchildren are not able to visit their grandparents during the holidays, many have the opportunity to foster intimacy from a distance; and the intensity of the few days spent during the holidays at their grandparents' also shows that the question of frequency and intensity of contact is something that the children see as being relative.

The number of grandparents may also multiply as parents and grandparents remarry and new family members appear. However, relations with social grandparents are usually complex. When the remarried parent is not the parent who has custody – usually the father



–, ties with the children tend to weaken, since men seem to tend more towards the family of their new companion and their new offspring. In these cases, children may gradually lose contact with their paternal grandparents and it is difficult for them to have contact with their social grandparents. They are thus not normally recognized as grandparents by the children and do not appear in their drawings.

When the children live in a reconstituted family, there are more opportunities to spend time with their grandparents by marriage – since step-mothers and step-fathers can establish this bond –, and a relationship may bloom. However, a number of variables come into play: the age of the child when the divorce occurs; the way the families and the children deal with the separation; the quality of the child's relationship and that of their parent with the new partner; the duration of the relationship between the parent and the new partner; and the form the new relationship takes (be it cohabitation, the birth of a new child, formal marriage, and so forth). Furthermore, the child's perception that the relationship with their social grandparents is genuine, reciprocal and affectionate goes a long way to determining their decision. The inclusion of social grandparents in this position depends greatly on the quality of the relationship, since there is no blood bond that unites them.

Sharing blood ties is something that the children covered by this study considered to be very important. This often suffices to justify their interest in their grandparents, even when they have never met them. However, ties need to be nourished and, when children perceive that there is a lack of interest, affection or contact on the part of the third generation – especially when they note that the relationship deteriorates over time or when grandparents fail to seek them out when they can – blood ties tend to be watered down and become less important. In these cases, the grandparents are often not regarded as such by the children and do not appear in their drawings. This shows that children have a strong say in their inclusion in the family and that it is not enough for the grandparents to consider themselves to be grandparents. To establish such a relationship, grandchildren also have to see themselves as grandchildren of these grandparents.

The quality of this relationship can be seen from the forms of address used, which may be cold and distant or warm and affectionate. The use of appellations such as “auntie”, “Mrs.” and “Ma’am”, used mainly in relations with social grandparents, reveals, for example, a certain emotional distance between the two generations, while the names used to address



some grandparents, suggest not only emotional intimacy but also a more egalitarian relationship, less based on the authority of the older generation. When ties with grandparents weaken and break down, the children may even forget their names. In the eyes of the grandchildren, these grandparents not only lose the status of grandparents but also their very identity.

In intergenerational relations, the grandparents' home plays an important role as it is the setting for most of the interactions between the two generations. In the children's testimony, it appears as a place of new discoveries, where they can have contact with old technology, photos of their ancestors and objects belonging to another age: the grandparents' home is a place from the past. On the other hand, many grandparents live in country towns or in homes that have large gardens and back yards, which are much appreciated by the children. The urbanization of cities has brought changes in dwellings and lifestyles: children's lives are increasingly confined to apartments, gated communities and shopping malls, where contact with nature is practically non-existent. The grandparents' house, therefore, is a place of adventure and new experiences, where the children literally "feel at home" and where they can do more things than they usually do in their own homes.

While, in their own homes, play is limited to their own bedrooms, where they are allowed to make a mess, in their grandparents' homes, they can play in all the rooms, and the rules of good behavior can be broken. The grandparents' house is therefore a place of entertainment and a place for investigation; a place that the older generation invests in to adapt it to create interactive environments, for playing with and receiving their grandchildren. Many generations come together there. In the stories and photos of the past, the grandparents bring to life generations that are no longer around, while the new generation plays around the house, especially during holiday celebrations and family gatherings. Under these circumstances, the children can also meet up with their cousins and play with them. In an age where many children do not have brothers and sisters, these meetings with cousins may be the only intragenerational contact there is in the family.

In their interactions with grandparents, the house is not only a place for play and discovery; it is also a setting for learning. This learning is shared, with both grandparents and grandchildren having a range of knowledge to bring to bear. Thus, just as the grandparents teach their grandchildren about the past, historical events and school subjects, the



grandchildren teach their grandparents about new scientific discoveries, new technology, new games and new ways of teaching and learning. This process would appear to be quite interactive, calling into question functionalist theories of the socialization of children and traditional educational theories that focus on the knowledge of adults.

Interaction also occurs through networks of care. One would be deceived to believe that the care is only provided by the grandparents. In their testimony, the children show that they too provide help, doing household chores, fetching water or slippers for their grandparents, bandaging injuries, calling a taxi when they hurt themselves, massaging aching parts of their bodies, helping the old ones get around the house. Moreover, the children tell us that the love and affection they show for their grandparents constitute an important form of care. And, when the grandparents are sick or very elderly, they show that this does not necessarily get in the way of their relationship. Grandparents and grandchildren adapt to new circumstances, changing the way they play and interact, so that they can continue doing so, albeit in a different manner.

In old age, the grandparents' bodies also change, but this is not interpreted by the children as something ugly and negative. The grandparents are beautiful in their singularity, which means that they are always beautiful, regardless of a social discourse that places so much emphasis on the youthful body. For the children, therefore, there are differences between "an old body" and "the old bodies of their grandparents", which are bodies that are inhabited by affection and a beauty that comes from another aesthetic perspective.

Without meaning to overlook the issue of conflicts between the generations, it should be pointed out that this was not a relevant factor in this study. The children revealed little in the way of disagreement, and, when this does occur, they do not necessarily interpret it as conflict<sup>68</sup>. This may be because, as they are children, they are accustomed to being reprimanded by adults, be it from parents, teachers, instructors, caregivers, or grandparents. On the other hand, the grandchildren also point out that the third generation leave discipline to the parents. Thus, the role of the grandparents is often that of giving advice about behavior and intervening only when behavior is seen by them as being

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<sup>68</sup> I refer here to the conflicts that arise from the very fact that generations spend time together, when they have different ideas, positions or lifestyles. As we have seen, the failure to recognize some grandparents as having this role may also reflect situations of conflict, but these derive more from family problems and lack of contact rather than from tensions arising as a result of grandparents and grandchildren sharing each other's company.



seriously wrong. The lack of conflict may, therefore, be related to the age of the grandchildren.

As we have seen, relations between grandparents and grandchildren are influenced by many factors and we cannot disregard issues of gender, age, geographical distance, styles, personalities, state of health, the quality of relations between parents and children, the quality of relations between mothers- and daughters-in-law, the separation of parents or grandparents, and remarriages, among others, if we wish to understand the complexity that envelops and gives life to these ties. Furthermore, the children may live in multiple family configurations, which not only alter over time, but also are combined with other forms. Those whose parents have joint custody, for example, may at times live in a single-parent family, at others in a reconstituted one, having passed through the experience of a nuclear family and cohabitation with grandparents shortly after their parents divorced. They may thus have experienced different situations that have influenced the course of their life and intergenerational relations.

Given this complexity, it should also be mentioned that this study was exploratory in nature and that some questions still need to be addressed in more detail and greater depth. A study, covering children from a single family group, which controlled for certain variables, would be able to shed more light on these issues. For example, of the children who live with their grandparents who participated in this study, most had lived there since birth and had not been through any abrupt changes, which are normal in cases of re-cohabitation, and would be interesting to analyze. Likewise, it would be interesting to study cases of children who live with their grandparents alone, without their parents or the influence of time on the process of inclusion or exclusion of social grandparents in reconstituted families or the differences in intergenerational contact in single-parent families headed by the mother and those headed by the father. These are questions that this exploratory study was unable to go into in any great depth which would be interesting topics for further research into childhood. Listening to the children themselves is a necessary stage and we, as adults, will only be able to make this step, if we are truly open to dialogue, if we are able to truly dissociate ourselves from our role as adults and interest ourselves in the otherness of childhood. We must, as Simone Weil (1996) suggests, not let differences get in the way of friendship, but likewise not let friendship blind us to differences.

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## APPENDIX I

### Survey of Data on Social Class

*Form for information on schooling, occupation and income*

#### ON THE MOTHER:

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Employment situation:

Employee	Unemployed	Retired	Alimony
Employer	Liberal profession	Other:	

Level of education:

Primary School not completed	Higher education
Primary School completed	Post-graduation (Specialization)
High School not completed	Post-graduation (Masters)
High School completed	Post-graduation (Doctorate)

#### ON THE FATHER:

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Employment situation:

Employee	Unemployed	Retired	Alimony
Employer	Liberal profession	Other:	

Level of education:

Primary School not completed	Higher education
Primary School completed	Post-graduation (Specialization)
High School not completed	Post-graduation (Masters)
High School completed	Post-graduation (Doctorate)

#### ON THE MATERNAL GRANDMOTHER:

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation (if retired, occupation prior to retirement): \_\_\_\_\_

Employment situation:

Employee	Unemployed	Retired	Alimony
Employer	Liberal profession	Other:	

Level of education:



	Primary School not completed			Higher education
	Primary School completed			Post-graduation (Specialization)
	High School not completed			Post-graduation (Masters)
	High School completed			Post-graduation (Doctorate)

**ON THE MATERNAL GRANDFATHER:**

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation (if retired, occupation prior to retirement): \_\_\_\_\_

Employment situation:

	Employee		Unemployed		Retired		Alimony
	Employer		Liberal profession		Other:		

Level of education:

	Primary School not completed			Higher education
	Primary School completed			Post-graduation (Specialization)
	High School not completed			Post-graduation (Masters)
	High School completed			Post-graduation (Doctorate)

**ON THE PATERNAL GRANDMOTHER:**

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation (if retired, occupation prior to retirement): \_\_\_\_\_

Employment situation:

	Employee		Unemployed		Retired		Alimony
	Employer		Liberal profession		Other:		

Level of education:

	Primary School not completed			Higher education
	Primary School completed			Post-graduation (Specialization)
	High School not completed			Post-graduation (Masters)
	High School completed			Post-graduation (Doctorate)

**ON THE PATERNAL GRANDFATHER:**

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation (if retired, occupation prior to retirement): \_\_\_\_\_

Employment situation:

	Employee		Unemployed		Retired		Alimony
	Employer		Liberal profession		Other:		

Level of education:

	Primary School not completed			Higher education
	Primary School completed			Post-graduation (Specialization)
	High School not completed			Post-graduation (Masters)
	High School completed			Post-graduation (Doctorate)



### HOUSEHOLD INCOME:

- In the child's household, what is the Gross monthly family income (including any monies received, such as pensions, social security, rent of properties and other sources of revenue)?\*

\*In the case of joint custody, please mark twice (one for the father's residence and one for the mothers).

Up to R\$ 1.020,00	R\$ 5,100 - R\$ 7,650
R\$ 1,020 - R\$ 1,530	R\$ 7,650 - R\$ 12,750
R\$ 1,530 - R\$ 3,060	More than R\$ 12,750
More than R\$ 3.060,00 a R\$ 5.100,00	

- Who are the people who contribute to the household income? (you may mark more than one option)

Mother	Maternal grandfather
Father	Maternal grandmother
Step-mother	Paternal grandfather
Step-father	Paternal grandmother
Others:	

- Of the people listed above, do any of them contribute more to the family income?
-



## APPENDIX II

### Project Proposal Presented to School

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Universidade Federal do Rio Grande Do Sul  
Post-graduation Program in Education  
&  
Universität Siegen  
Internationale Promotion Erziehungswissenschaft

#### Research Project Proposal for Doctorate in Education

**Candidate:** Anne Carolina Ramos

**Advisor:** Prof. Dr. Johannes Doll (PPGEdu-UFRGS)

**Co-Advisor:** Profa. Dra. Insa Fooker (INEDD-Siegen)

#### Introduction:

This research project, developed in collaboration with the Post-graduation Program in Education of the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul/UFRGS and the International Doctorate in Education Program of *Universität Siegen/INEDD* (Germany), aims to study intergenerational relations between grandparents and grandchildren from the point of view of the children. This focus aims to establish a dialogue between the areas of Education, Sociology and Gerontology, with a view to revealing the exchanges, interactions and lifestyles of these two generations (grandchildren who are still children and their grandparents) and the different roles and meanings that both have assumed in the various contemporary family configurations: nuclear families, single-parent families, reconstituted families and children who live with their grandparents.

#### Aims:

1. *Why carry out research on the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren who are still children?*
  - It is through their grandparents that children have an opportunity to get to know the world that preceded not only their own birth but also that of their own parents, establishing an imaginary line between the past, present and future;



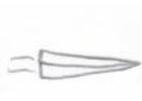
- Studies have shown (PEIXOTO, 2000; HOOYMAN & KIYAK, 2001; ATTIAS-DONFUT & SEGALEN, 1998) that ties between grandparents and grandchildren are mainly developed in childhood, when these two generations tend to spend more time together: when providing care, at weekends, Sunday lunches, school holidays, etc.;
- The changes contemporary families have undergone – such as the decline in the institution of marriage, the rise in the number of divorces, cohabitation, single-parent families, unemployment, women going out to work and lifestyle changes—have affected not only the way parents interact with their children, but also the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. In these new family configurations, grandparents have assumed different roles, ranging from cohabitation and daily caregiving, to partial or total loss of contact, occasioned principally by divorce and by more conflictual relations between parents and children.

## 2. *Why study the point of view of the children?*

- Some studies have investigated the interaction between grandparents and grandchildren, although most of these do not consider the point of view of the grandchildren and even fewer the point of view of grandchildren when they are still children;
- Children have a lot to say about the culture of the society they live in. Their knowledge can tell us a lot, not only about their games and playthings, but also about the wider world around us and the society in which we live;
- Studies that seek to give a say to children are relatively recent, having been inspired by the field of the sociology of childhood which emerged in the early 1990s. There is thus still much work to be done if we want to place them at the center of our research;
- Children belong to the only generational group that does not produce research of its own, but this invisibility of childhood does not mean that they lack an opinion, even though investigating this poses serious methodological challenges.

## 3. *What is the importance of this study for the field of Education?*

- To contribute methodologically to the development of research that seeks to analyze the reports of children and not only reports on children;
- To enable scholars and education professionals to have greater knowledge of the family relations of the children they study or teach, and of the role that grandparents play in contact between family and school;



- To find out more about the intergenerational contact between grandparents and grandchildren and the “roles” that both play in different family contexts, the help that is given and received, the support and solidarity one generation shows for the other, the conflicts that exist and the children’s memories of their grandparents;
- To see this in the context of present-day demographic changes, observing how the lower birth rate and higher life expectancy have brought important changes to everyday life, which it is indispensable to debate in the field of education. Gerontological studies have been concerned to examine the new relations that have emerged with the increase in the elderly population, while studies of childhood have not addressed the question of what it means to be a child in a country that is rapidly aging.

### **Methodology:**

#### *1) General Approach to the Field and division of children into groups:*

**1st Step:** The research will be conducted in two 2nd and/or 3rd grade classes (depending on their availability and profile) who attend school at the same time of day. First, I shall survey the students who live in the family configurations I intend to study (nuclear families, single-parent families, reconstituted families and living with grandparents) and I shall share all the more important findings of the research with the parents of the two classes. If possible, I would like to hold a parents’ meeting. If not, I will explain my presence in the classroom and the possible participation of the children in a written communication.

**2nd Step:** I will spend around three weeks accompanying the classes in order to establish a bond with the children and to familiarize myself with the classroom activities (I shall explain the importance of this later). After two weeks, I shall explain the research objectives and formally invite the children to participate in the study. Interested students will receive an authorization form (*Term of Informed Consent*) to be signed by their parents. On the same day, I will make it clear that not all the children we be able to participate in the research and that, if necessary, I will draw lots to select the participants.

**3rd Step:** In accordance with the permission of the parents and the wishes of the child, I shall put together the group of children to participate in the research. The idea is to have four members of each family group from each class, giving a total of 16 children per class and 32 in all. Once this group



has been formed, the children selected will receive the *Child's Term of Informed Consent* and further explanation of the research.

2) *The development of the research by class:*

- The children will take part in interviews in small groups. There Will be four groups: one for each family configuration (nuclear families, single-parent families, reconstituted families and living with grandparents);
- Each group of children will be taken out of class once a week for around 40-50 mins to take part in the interview. I opted for shorter interviews, in groups at different times so as not to tire the children and interrupt their lessons;
- There will be six meetings in total for each group, making six weeks of interviews and three weeks of observation;
- As a primary school teacher, I promise to help them with tasks given by the class teacher at the time of the interview, to ensure minimum interruption of lessons (so it is important to know what the children are working on);
- The interviews will be recorded with a voice recorder and writing and drawing exercises will be included;

3) *Timetable for working with the children<sup>1</sup>:*

MARCH						
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15 Integration with the children	16 Integration with the children	17 Integration with the children	18 Integration with the children	19 Integration with the children	20	21
22 Integration with the children	23 Integration with the children	24 Integration with the children	25 Integration with the children	26 Integration with the children	27	28
29 Integration with the children; Explanation of research; Survey of potential participants	30 Integration with the children; Draw for participants/groups	31 Integration with the children; See who has brought parents authorization				

<sup>1</sup> G1 refers to the group from "Class A" and G2 to the group from "Class B".



ABRIL						
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
			1 Integration with the children; Final definition of interview groups	2 Integration with the children; Final definition of interview groups	3	4
5 <b>Interview 1</b> G1: Nuclear G2: Nuclear	6 <b>Interview 1</b> G1: Single-parent G1: Single-parent	7 <b>Interview 1</b> G1: Reconstituted G2: Reconstituted	8 <b>Interview 1</b> G1: Living with grandparents G2: Living with grandparents	9	10	11
12 <b>Interview 2</b> G1: Nuclear G2: Nuclear	13 <b>Interview 2</b> G1: Single-parent G2: Single-parent	14 <b>Interview 2</b> G1: Reconstituted G2: Reconstituted	15 <b>Interview 2</b> G1: Living with grandparents G2: Living with grandparents	16	17	18
19 <b>Interview 3</b> G1: Nuclear G2: Nuclear	20 <b>Interview 3</b> G1: Single-parent G2: Single-parent	21 <b>Interview 3</b> G1: Reconstituted G2: Reconstituted	22 <b>Interview 3</b> G1: Living with grandparents G2: Living with grandparents	23	24	25
26 <b>Interview 4</b> G1: Nuclear G2: Nuclear	27 <b>Interview 4</b> G1: Single-parent G2: Single-parent	28 <b>Interview 4</b> G1: Reconstituted G2: Reconstituted	29 <b>Interview 4</b> G1: Living with grandparents G2: Living with grandparents	30		

MAY						
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
					1	2
3 <b>Interview 5</b> G1: Nuclear G2: Nuclear	4 <b>Interview 5</b> G1: Single-parent G2: Single-parent	5 <b>Interview 5</b> G1: Reconstituted G2: Reconstituted	6 <b>Interview 5</b> G1: Living with grandparents G2: Living with grandparents	7	8	9
10 <b>Interview 6</b> G1: Nuclear G2: Nuclear	11 <b>Interview 6</b> G1: Single-parent G2: Single-parent	12 <b>Interview 6</b> G1: Reconstituted G2: Reconstituted	13 <b>Interview 6</b> G1: Living with grandparents G2: Living with grandparents	14	15	16
17 End of fieldwork with children	18 End of fieldwork with children	19 End of fieldwork with children	20 End of fieldwork with children	21	22	23



## APPENDIX III

### Institutional Term of Consent

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#### INSTITUTIONAL TERM OF CONSENT

This study, carried out in collaboration with the *Post-graduation Program in Education of the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul/UFRGS* and the *International Doctorate Program in Education of Universität Siegen/INEDD* (Germany), aims to study intergenerational relations between grandparents and grandchildren from the point of view of the children. This focus seeks to establish a dialogue between the fields of education, sociology of childhood and gerontology, with a view to providing greater visibility for the exchanges, interactions and lifestyles of these two generations (grandchildren who are still children and their grandparents) and the different roles and meanings that both assume in the manifold configurations of contemporary families: nuclear families, single-parent families, reconstituted families and living with grandparents.

This study envisages the participation of students from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades of Primary School. Data will be gathered by spending time with the children in the classroom, followed by a series of open interviews in the school environment. The interviews will be carried out in small groups (of three), grouped according to the family configurations outlined above. Parents will also receive a form, in which they will describe certain other aspects of the life of the child.

Parents and students will be clearly informed that their participation is voluntary and that they may drop out at any stage, without incurring any penalty. At any point, the children, their parents or guardians or the institution may request information on the procedure or other matters relating to the study. Due care will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of the information, in such a way as to protect the identity of the participants and the school. All materials collected will be kept in the possession of researcher and doctoral candidate in education, *Anne Carolina Ramos*, and will be used for research purposes only. The personal data of the participants will not be mentioned in the oral presentation or in any written publication. The results will be reported to the students and to the institution following the conclusion of the Doctorate (March 2011).

The study hopes to make important contributions for scholars and professionals in the fields of education and gerontology, highlighting issues relating to the methodology for research with



children, and intergenerational contact and relations. I would like to thank the institution and the participants involved in this research and to make myself available for additional clarification. The supervising professors for this thesis are Prof. Dr. Johannes Doll (UFRGS) and Profa. Dra. Insa Fooker (INEDD). Should you wish to contact the researcher in person, please call (51) 8152.5945 or send an email: [annecarolina.ramos@gmail.com](mailto:annecarolina.ramos@gmail.com).

Anne Carolina Ramos  
(Researcher)

I agree to students from this institution participating in this study,

---

Signature  
(Director of Innovation, Research and Educational Technology)

Porto Alegre, ..... March 2010.



## APPENDIX IV

### Form to be filled in by the children for the family survey

Name: ..... Age: .....

Class: ..... Teacher: .....

#### **Questions about my home and my family**

1) Where d you live?  House  Apartment

2) Neighborhood:  
.....

3) Who lives with you?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Mother	<input type="checkbox"/>	Step-mother	<input type="checkbox"/>	Grandmother
<input type="checkbox"/>	Father	<input type="checkbox"/>	Step-father	<input type="checkbox"/>	Grandfather
<input type="checkbox"/>	Brothers	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cousins	<input type="checkbox"/>	Aunts and Uncles

Other people: .....

4) Do you have any brothers and sisters? ..... How many? .....  
What are their names and ages?

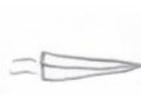
.....  
.....

5) Do you have any great-grandparents? What are their names?

.....  
.....

6) Where and with whom do you stay before and after school?

.....  
.....



## APPENDIX V

### Letter of Presentation and Term of Informed Consent for Parents

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Porto Alegre, March 2010.

### Invitation

**Dear Parents or Guardians,**

First I would like to introduce myself. My name is *Anne Carolina Ramos*. I am a teacher, with a Masters degree in Education from UFRGS and a candidate for a doctorate in Education from the same university in collaboration with the University of Siegen, in Germany. I worked for a number of years at this school, with classes from the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade. I currently live in Germany and am in Brazil temporarily to do the field work for my Doctorate. I am interested in studying the relations between children and their grandparents in different family configurations.

These are important times for contact between these two generations. Until not long ago, the average life-span did not allow many grandparents to see their grandchildren born and grow up. Greater life expectancy has allowed them to spend more time together and has also opened up the possibility of many children knowing and spending time with their great-grandparents. Furthermore, many grandchildren are spending a good part of their everyday lives with their grandparents and some even live with them. Numerous studies have addressed these relations from the point of view of the grandparents, but few researchers have investigated the point of view of the grandchildren, especially when they are still children. This is why I would like to invite your child to take part in this study.

The children will be interviewed by me during school hours, in interviews in groups of three. They will be taken out of the classroom *once a week* for 40-50 min., over a six week period. This will not harm their school work in any way. As I am accompanying and helping the children in the classroom, I promise to give greater attention to those who will be with me in the interviews with their schoolwork. I have also agreed with the class teacher that the interviews will not be conducted during special classes, tests, "important activities" or classes where new material is being introduced. As I am a teacher myself, I am familiar with the school's teaching methods and I am accompanying the class teacher's work with the children, I believe that this can be accomplished without undue disruption.



I would like to thank you and remind you that the participation of the children in these research activities is very important. It is crucial that we, teachers and parents, are able to listen to the children, in order to arrive at a better understanding of their points of view and their relation with the world that surrounds them. This can only be achieved through direct contact with them and this is why the interviews are so important.

I hope I can count on your support and collaboration at this stage in my research. Should you agree to your son or daughter taking part, I am sending you enclosed a “Term of Informed Consent”, with more specific information on the research and the rights of the child participating in the interview, which will need to be signed by a parent or guardian. Should you have any further queries, you can contact me by telephone (51) 8152.5945 or come and talk to me person, as I am at the school every day.

**I thank you in advance,**

**Anne Carolina Ramos**



## TERM OF INFORMED CONSENT

### Presentation of the study:

The present study aims to investigate the relations between grandparents and grandchildren from the point of view of the children. The study forms part of research for a Doctorate in Education for the Post-graduation Program in Education of the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (PPGEdu/UFRGS) and the International Doctorate Program in Education of the University of Siegen (INEDD), in Germany. The study focuses on these relations in different family configurations and attempts to understand how the children relate to their grandparents, the spaces they share, and the teaching and learning and care-giving that goes on between them.

At a time when we are going through important demographic changes (occasioned by the increase in the elderly population and the reduction in the number of children) and important changes in families, it is crucial that we understand the relations that pertain between these two generations.

### The participation of children in the research:

#### 1) The interviews:

- The children will participate in the research by way of interviews in groups of three, which will take place during school hours at the school;
- Each group of children will be taken out of class *once a week* for around 40 min. to take part in the interview. There will be six meetings in all for each group, giving a total of six weeks of interviews. We decided to conduct shorter interviews in groups at different times, so as not to tire the children and to avoid any detrimental impact on their schoolwork;
- The interviews will take place at times agreed with the class teacher, taking care not to interrupt special classes, tests, important activities or the introduction of new subjects;
- The researcher also agrees to help the children register, explain and organize the activities introduced in class at the time of the interview, so as not to interfere with the children's schoolwork;
- The interviews will be recorded and transcribed. The meetings with the children will involve speaking, writing short texts, drawing and taking photos (no images of people or of the children themselves will be included) which will form part of the material for the thesis;



- The topics to be discussed during the interviews are the following: what it means to be a grandparent; the age of grandparents; forms of address used with grandparents; geographical proximity, the nature and regularity of contact between grandparents and grandchildren; the grandparents' house and family gatherings; exchanges, learning experiences and care-giving;
- This research also involves three homework activities (to be announced), but these are not obligatory: 1) a writing task; 2) photos of the children's favorite places in their grandparents' homes (with no images of people); and 3) conversations on photographs of family gatherings, which will not be used in the thesis.

## 2) Ethical Considerations:

- The findings and the results of this research will remain confidential and the real names of the participants (parents, grandparents and children) will not be revealed in any oral or published written presentation (including the doctoral thesis itself);
- The children will also receive a "Children's Term of Informed Consent", which will be explained by the researcher;
- Participation in this research poses no risk to the individual interviewed. If in the course of the research, a participating child decides not to continue, they are completely free to do so, without incurring any penalty.

The researcher responsible is Anne Carolina Ramos. The advisors are: Prof. Dr. Johannes Doll (UFRGS) and Profa. Dra. Insa Fooker (Siegen/Germany).

As a researcher, I promise to respond to any queries that the participant may have during or subsequent to the research, by telephone (51) 8152.5945 or email [annecarolina.ramos@gmail.com](mailto:annecarolina.ramos@gmail.com).

Having been duly informed of all aspects of this research and received answers to any queries, I,

.....  
(Name of parent or guardian)

grant permission for my son/daughter,

.....



(Name of child)

to participate in this research project.

..... (Signature of parent or guardian)

..... (Signature of researcher)

..... (Signature of Prof. Dr. Johannes Doll)

Porto Alegre, ..... of ..... 2010.



## APPENDIX VI

### Additional activity given to children who were not selected for participation in the research

**Dear Parents,**

My name is *Anne Carolina Ramos* and I am a candidate for a doctorate in Education at Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul in collaboration with the University of *Siegen*, Germany. I am conducting research into the relation between children and their grandparents and, to this end, I selected, at the beginning of the school year, a group of children to participate in interviews. Some children who, unfortunately, were not selected, have approached me to ask about the possibility of taking part in at least one of the research activities. I have therefore put together the enclosed material.

I would like to request your permission for your son or daughter to carry out this activity at home for future use in my thesis and in any articles, books, and academic papers that may arise from it.

This activity poses no risk to your child.

If you agree to this activity, please sign the authorization below:

I ..... (name of parent or guardian), authorize the enclosed material produced by my son/daughter ..... (name of child) to be used for the doctoral research of *Anne Carolina Ramos* and to be reproduced in the text of the thesis, book, articles, or academic paper that may subsequently be published.

..... (Signature of parent or guardian)

I ..... (name of child), agree to complete this task and to the use of my drawings and texts in the research or in subsequent articles and academic papers published by *Anne Carolina Ramos*.

..... (signature of child)

..... (signature of researcher)

Should you have any queries, please contact me by email [annecarolina.ramos@gmail.com](mailto:annecarolina.ramos@gmail.com) or telephone **(51) 8152.5945**.

Many thanks!  
**Anne Carolina Ramos**

Porto Alegre, ..... May 2010.



Name: ..... Class: .....

Teacher: ..... Date: ...../...../.....

### „MY GRANDPARENTS AND I“

**Task 1: I would like you to write something about your grandparents.** On the cover, draw something that illustrates your essay.



**Task 2: Close your eyes, think and complete the following sentences...**

a) My grandparents mean to me .....

.....

.....

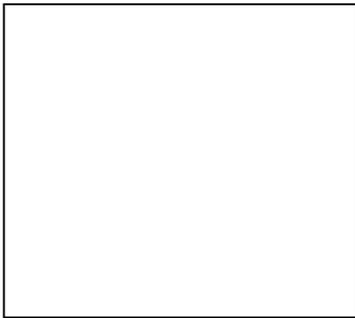
b) When I think of them, I remember .....

.....

.....

**Task 3: Draw the following situation in the boxes:**

a) I learn from my grandparents how to:

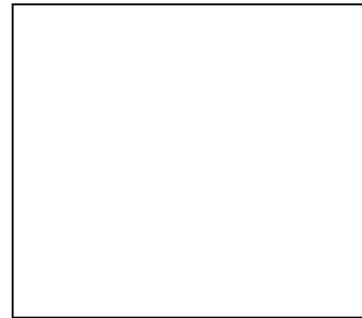


\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

c) I teach my grandparents to:



\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b) Help given or received:



\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

d) A special memory:



\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX VII

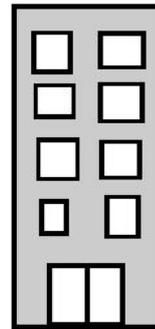
### Photography Activity

#### Now you are the photographer!

##### What are we going to do?

Would you like to take photographs (about 5) of the places you like most at your (paternal and/or maternal) grandparents' house, even if you live with them. Some suggestions:

- Which are the places you most like to stay in when you are at your grandparents'?
- Where do you play?
- Do you have a secret hiding place?
- Do you have objects, clothes or toys at your grandparents' house? Where do you keep them?
- Do you sleep over at your grandparents'?



You can ask for someone to develop the photos for you (I will pay for this later) or send them by email for me to print out ([annecarolina.ramos@gmail.com](mailto:annecarolina.ramos@gmail.com)). If you are unable to take photographs,



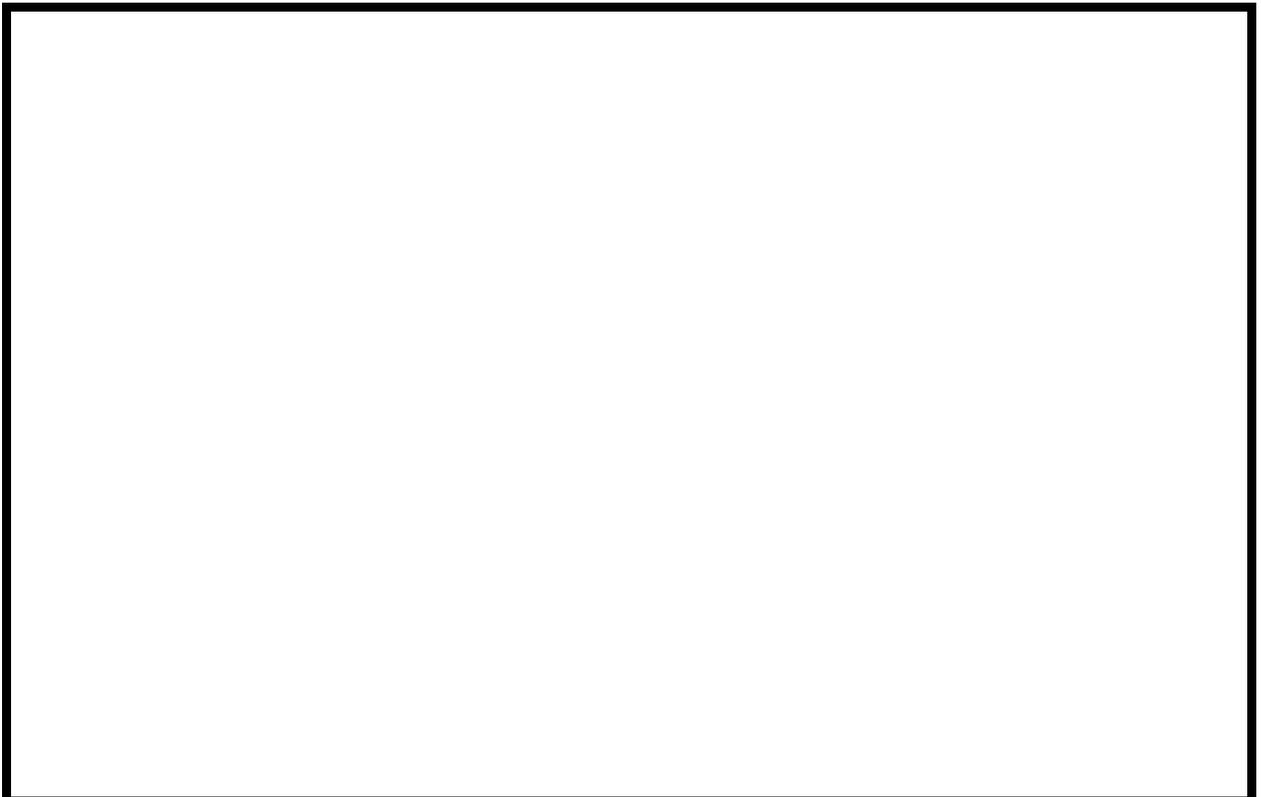
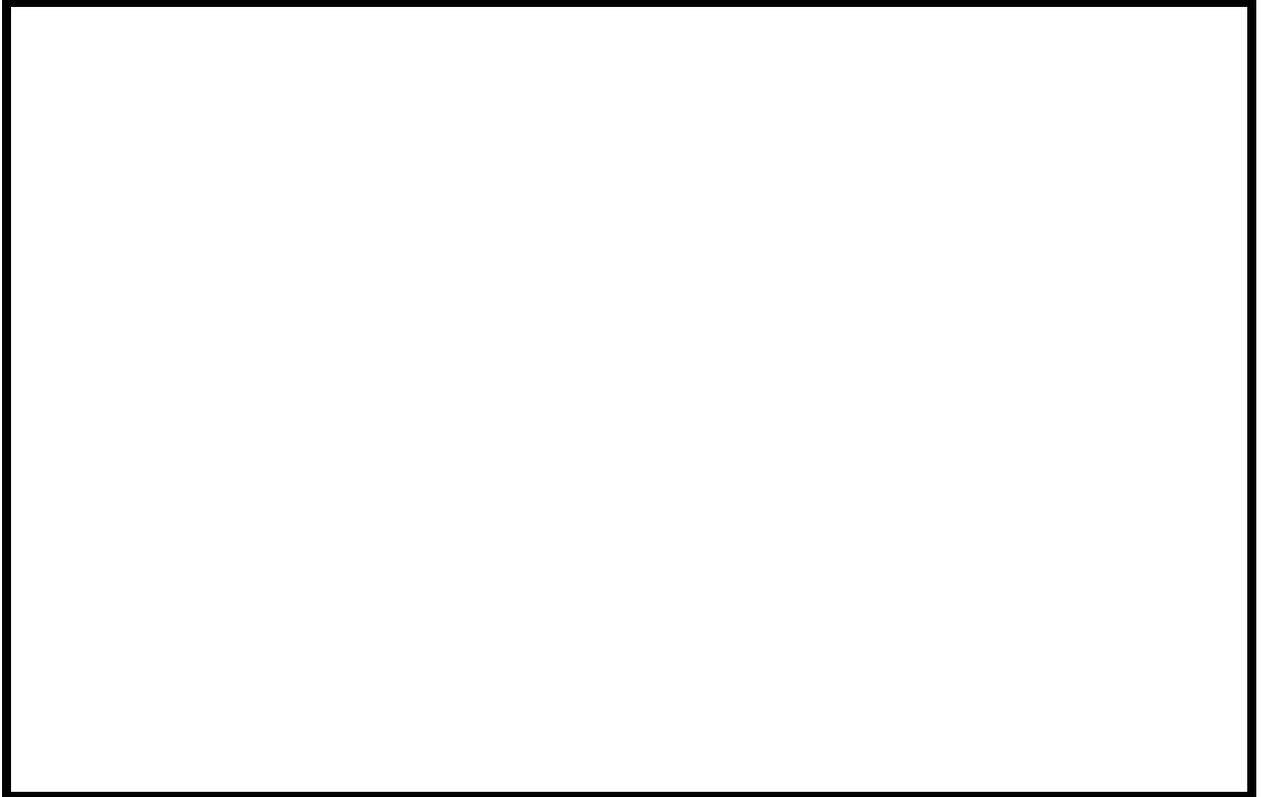
you can think of your favorite places and draw them... We will not use your pictures in any of our meetings! 😊

One more thing: the photos you take cannot contain images of people and you must ask your grandparents for permission, ok?

**Anne Carolina**



**Space for drawings, IF you are unable to take pictures:**





## Permission to Use Images

### “PHOTOGRAPHS OF YOUR GRANDCHILDREN’S FAVORITE PLACES IN THEIR GRANDPARENTS’ HOMES”

Dear grandparents,

Your grandchild is taking part in a research project investigating relations between grandparents and grandchildren from the point of view of the children. One of the activities involves their favorite places in their grandparents’ home. I would thus like to request your permission for your grandchild to take photographs in your home (without including images of people). These photographs will be used during the interviews with me and will form part of the thesis. If you agree to this, please sign below.

I, ..... (name of grandparent),  
 authorize my grandchild ..... (name of child) to  
 take photos in my home and permit these to be used later in the research that my  
 grandchild is participating in. I authorize the publication of these images in *Anne Carolina Ramos’s* doctoral thesis and any subsequent publication.

..... (Grandparent’s signature)

..... (Researcher’s signature)

Porto Alegre, ..... May 2010.

Anne Carolina Ramos (51 – 8152.5945)

[annecarolina.ramos@gmail.com](mailto:annecarolina.ramos@gmail.com)



**Permission to Use Images:  
“FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS”**

Dear parents,

In our research, we talk about photos of family gatherings brought by your children. I have already requested permission for these to be used in the thesis and now request that, if you do agree to the publication of these photographs, you kindly sign this short term of consent.

Many thanks,  
Anne Carolina Ramos

I ..... (name of child’s parent or guardian), authorize ANNE CAROLINA RAMOS to use the photographs of family gatherings brought by ..... (name of child) in her doctoral thesis, and agree to their publication in any future publications arising from this research. As the owner of these photographs, I authorize the use of the image of the individuals present in them and their publication nationally or internationally.

.....(Signature of parent/guardian)

..... (Signature of researcher)

Porto Alegre, ..... May 2010.



**APPENDIX VIII**

**Writing Task**

Name: .....

**Writing Task:  
"MY GRANDPARENTS AND I"**

Let us write a text? Choose one of your grandparents and tell us about your relationship with him/her. This text is very important for our research. It is our last activity!

.....  
(Title)

I chose to write about .....(name of grandparent )  
because.....

My grandparent is .....  
.....  
.....

When I think of him/her, I remember .....  
.....  
.....

My grandparent and I.....  
.....  
.....

I spend a lot of time.....when.....  
.....  
.....

I would like to tell him/her.....  
.....



## APPENDIX IX

### Child's Term of Informed Consent

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#### CHILD'S TERM OF INFORMED CONSENT

This text with a strange title – “Child’s Term of Informed Consent” – explains what we will do during the research and the rights of the participants.

After reading it together, you can take it home to your parents or show it to a friend before signing it and agreeing to take part and help me with my work.

Don't worry! You can change your mind at any time.

#### What will we do?



- We will meet once a week for the interview. You will not be alone. I will interview you with two of your classmates.
- We will be in a separate room.
- While we are talking, I will record our conversation so that I can listen to it again later.
- During the interview we will talk, draw, write and take photographs.
- We will meet six times.
- You have the right to refuse to participate in any of the activities.
- If you do not like the meetings, you can stop coming at any time.
- I will keep everything we do in our meetings in a safe place.
- Your words, texts, drawings and photographs will be used in the research. But I will not use your real name. For the research, we will invent a different name so that no-one knows who we are, but you will be able to see your own work.





- I will not speak to anyone you know about anything you tell me in the interview.



- One more thing: in the interviews, there are no right or wrong answers. The activities you carry out will not be corrected. I am not teaching you, you are going to teach me about the things you know about your life with your grandparents.

After reading and understanding how the research will be done, I

..... (your full name) agree to take part.

..... (Anne Carolina Ramos – researcher).

Porto Alegre, ..... of ..... 2010.



## APPENDIX X

### ABC Report available on G1

28/01/10 - 07h30 – updated on 28/01/10 - 09h54

## Child of 3 rings 911 and saves grandmother's life in US

**Mother taught child how to ring 911 days before.**

**Doctors say grandmother survived stroke thanks to quick reaction of her grandson.**

**From G1, in São Paulo**

A boy of just three managed to ring 911 and save his grandmother's life in Maple Shade, New Jersey, in the USA.

According to doctors, had it not been for the boy's quick reaction, his grandmother, who is in hospital recovering from a stroke, may not have survived.



Jaden Bolli, aged 3, who rang 911 on his own to ask for help for his grandmother

(Photo: Reproduction/ ABC)

Candance Robbins, Jaden Bolli's mother, says that she had taught the boy how to dial 911 in case of an accident only days before.

"I told him that he should dial 911, press the green button and tell them that he needs help", his mother told ABC.



Last Friday, Jaden was staying with his grandmother, Patricia Bolli. They were doing a jigsaw when Bolli suddenly had a fit. “I fell down and passed out”, the grandmother says. “I remember Jaden shouting: ‘Granny, wake up!’”

Minutes later, the boy rang 911. Within minutes, the police and paramedics were at the house in Maple Shade, where Jaden opened the door to them so that they could come to his grandma’s aid.

According to Jaden’s father, John Bolli, the fact that he had not taken fright and panicked and had not been shy of making the call were fundamental in ensuring that the grandmother was reached in time.

Available at: < <http://g1.globo.com/Noticias/Mundo>>