

## INCLUD-ED Bo@agua

The phrase “Think outside the box” is written on the t-shirt of the Head teacher of the ‘Schools cluster Boa Água’, Professor Nuno Mantas. It is common for the school director to share inspiring phrases as a way to encourage members of the school community to challenge themselves. “Think outside the box” was the motto, which, in 2017 inspired the school to participate in the [Successful Educational Actions of the INCLUD-ED project](#). This project encouraged public recognition of the Community of Parents and Friends of the school, and created a permanent change in the concept at Boa Agua of what a school should be.

The school staff had its daily routine and weekly agendas filled with the Mixed Commissions, [Interactive Groups](#), and [Dialogic Gatherings](#) in kindergarten and primary-level classes and which were being integrated at the 6th and 9th grade levels. The regular presence and involvement of volunteers in classrooms was no longer surprising to anyone, and indeed had changed the school culture. Members of the school community were so focused on this work that they were barely aware of the threat of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

As schools shut down, the Boa Agua school communicated with volunteers through its WhatsApp group, which has been particularly useful for those who do not have internet at home (Carla Ribeiro, educator). The school’s teachers explored video conferencing platforms used for remote learning. Parent volunteers helped with this “I had problems with my computer, but Jorge -one parent- fixed it and I know that he has helped other parents” (Ana Viana, teacher). These relationships between parents and teachers had already been developed through the pedagogies Interactive Groups, the Mixed Commissions and the Dialogic Gathering. As noted by the Assistant Director, Rui Silva “We have delivered about a hundred computers to families and to the English teacher. However, it was not the teacher who made the request; it was the parents who mobilized to help her. ”

Parents and teachers looked for ways to support teachers during remote learning imposed by the pandemic by exploring the potential uses of different technologies. In a virtual Tutored Library, the parents gave tips to one another: “The mother explained how to download the files and open the links. I'm glad she helped me... it was very difficult” ( Sara Allen, teacher). Parents helped each other, fixed each other's computers, gave their best advice, and above all, knew they were not alone. The students felt that they continued to be part of the school community and that now, more than ever, everyone knew each other and strove for their child's performance in school.

However, there were also challenges. For example, some parents thought teachers were not sending enough work or were not doing enough work themselves; some teachers said parents were not responding to their messages or were not interested, or that students were not sending in their assignments. Remote learning did not seem worthwhile. However, these complaints were soon transformed by the positive relationships that had already been created in the classes. Teachers, parents, students remembered that they were not just any person "because," as one teacher recounted, "... I call them by their names, I know them, I know the difficulties they go through". Families reminded each other of the teachers' dedication and commitment, pointing out the excellent professionals in the school.

### **Dialogic Gatherings online**

During confinement, the school continued to develop the [Dialogic Literary Gatherings](#) online, allowing collective construction of knowledge through global literature.

The students in Ana Viana's class chose "Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves." Teachers took advantage of the pages discussed in the online meetings to also explore grammar and assign text production exercises. Ana Viana observed, “I find it easier to search the vocabulary using online resources like the dictionary and they are curious to search complementary information about the book. It is a great opportunity to improve autonomy.” In Mafalda Araújo's 4th grade class, students chose the work of the Grimm brothers. Daniela, a student in the class said, “We have already finished Around the World in 80 days and we cannot stop!” Virginia Nobre commented that she missed the online gatherings after confinement. “In

videoconference, the kids have difficulty expressing themselves, but when discussing in Dialogic Gatherings

they make special effort for the other to understand their ideas.” The children have missed the gatherings too. “I like it when others are able to understand me because it means that I explain myself well” (Maria, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade student).—Distance Dialogic Literary Gatherings “were a bit different but I think the principles of dialogic learning were present (...) each child shared their observations and their feelings, they continued to be so inspiring” (Helena Prates, teacher).

In pre-school, with children between the ages of 4, and 6 participated in the Dialogic Art Gatherings. As described by Carla Ribeiro “with distance learning the children explored the art work images with me [as the teacher] and their parents. Families wanted to continue the work by writing everything that the children said. I thought it would be good to continue these gatherings online because they help very much to develop attention and creativity. During this confinement what I noticed was the parents' astonishment when they children were able to build complete sentences with strong meaning.”

### **Class assemblies and the [Brave Club](#)**

The class discussions have been transformed in forums for self-discovery through the “[Clube dos Valentos](#)” ([Brave Club](#)). “Out of school, a click away, but close to the heart. It has been an exercise of full democracy that has improved coexistence and the development of supportive relationships within and outside the school environment among families, teachers, and students. Everyone was exercising the right to citizenship and responsibility, through the work of their own emotions”- writes Carla Cardoso teacher of the second year.

The students learned to understand their friends' reactions by understanding their own family context and the financial and social difficulties being experienced in every family's home. “We have a direct window now and we see things and we hear other things.” In one case, Vanda Cabrita, who teaches 1<sup>st</sup> year students, reached out to

the mother of a student, who “...was needing help and guidance, she was so anxious.” (Vanda Cabrita, teacher 1st year class).

In this virtual school, without walls but with many windows, parents and teachers have never spoken as much as they do now. But are parents teachers? Are teachers psychologists? Together everyone in the community is trying to find a common ground and language, where everyone’s efforts help children to thrive. The priority now is to create a safe supportive environment for students based on understanding and mutual respect, with the social cohesion as common aim. As described by a teacher, Cecília Ascensão, “in this distance teaching, I try to discover and apply the same principles behind the Successful Educational Actions proposed by the [INCLUD-ED](#) project that I defend and believe in” The school community thus persisted with aims to transform the school they had dreamed of!

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