

**“AND THE WORLD WILL SEE A FLOWER BLOOM FROM THE IMPOSSIBLE GROUND””: STUDENTS’ LEARNING IN A SITUATION OF VULNERABILITY**

***“E O MUNDO VAI VER UMA FLOR Brotar DO IMPOSSÍVEL CHÃO””: APRENDIZAGEM DE ALUNOS EM SITUAÇÃO DE VULNERABILIDADE***

***“Y EL MUNDO VA A VER UNA FLOR Brotar DEL IMPOSIBLE SUELO””: APRENDIZADO DE ALUMNOS EN SITUACION DE VULNERABILIDAD***

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**ABSTRACT:** This text proposes a reflection on the impact of the pandemic triggered by the coronavirus in students’ learning process, mainly in the public school system. The starting point is the analysis of data collected from the work carried out with students assisted by the Project called Believe, developed in a municipal school in Rondonópolis, Mato Grosso, before 2020. With the suspension of classroom lessons, students were abruptly removed from schools and began to depend on the infrastructure available in their homes. It is a fact that, the poorer the family, the more precarious the student's participation in emergency remote education has been. Furthermore, many parents and/or guardians do not have enough formal schooling or preparation to help students carry out the activities sent teachers. Thus, we seek to analyze the impacts of the pandemic and consider alternatives that provide learning opportunities for students in a vulnerable situation.

**KEYWORDS:** Education. Learning. Educational support. Pandemic. Project Believe.

**RESUMO:** Este texto propõe uma reflexão sobre o impacto da pandemia desencadeada pelo coronavírus na aprendizagem de estudantes, principalmente da rede pública de ensino. Toma-se como ponto de partida a análise de dados coletados a partir do trabalho realizado com alunos atendidos no Projeto Acreditar, desenvolvido em uma escola da rede municipal de Rondonópolis, Mato Grosso, antes de 2020. Com a suspensão das aulas presenciais, os estudantes foram abruptamente afastados das escolas e passaram a depender da infraestrutura disponível em seus lares. É fato que, quanto mais pobre a família, mais precária tem sido a participação do aluno no ensino remoto emergencial. Some-se a isso o fato de que muitos pais e/ou responsáveis não têm escolaridade nem preparo suficientes para ajudar os estudantes na realização das atividades enviadas. Assim, busca-se analisar impactos da pandemia e ponderar sobre alternativas que oportunizem a aprendizagem de alunos em situação de vulnerabilidade.

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**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Educação. Aprendizagem. Apoio educacional. Pandemia. Projeto Acreditar.

**RESUMEN:** Este texto propone una reflexión sobre el impacto de la pandemia desencadenada por el coronavirus en el aprendizaje de estudiantes, principalmente de la red pública de ensino. Se toma como punto de partida el análisis de datos recolectados a partir del trabajo realizado con alumnos atendidos en el Proyecto Acreditar, desarrollado en una escuela de la red municipal de Rondonópolis, Mato Grosso, antes de 2020. Con la suspensión de las clases presenciales, los estudiantes fueron abruptamente apartados de las escuelas y pasaron a depender de la infraestructura disponible en sus hogares. Es un hecho que, mientras más pobre la familia es, más precaria ha sido la participación del alumno en la enseñanza remoto de emergencia. Sumada esto, la realidad de que muchos padres y/o responsables no tienen escolaridad ni preparación suficientes para ayudar a los estudiantes en la realización de las actividades enviadas. Así, se busca analizar impactos de la pandemia y reflexionar sobre alternativas que den oportunidad al aprendizaje de alumnos en situación de vulnerabilidad.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Educación. Aprendizaje. Apoyo educacional. Pandemia. Proyecto Acreditar.

## Introduction

*To dream one more impossible dream  
To fight when it is easy to give in  
To defeat the invincible enemy  
Deny when the rule is to sell*

*Suffering the implacable torture  
Breaking the unfeasible prison  
Flying at an improbable limit  
Touching the inaccessible ground<sup>3</sup>*

The reflection proposed in this text turns to the discussion of the impacts in the educational field resulting from the pandemic triggered by the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), causing the disease COVID-19, more particularly on a group of students in the municipal network of Rondonópolis - MT.

Some large-scale research is being carried out to evaluate and analyze this impact, such as the one developed by the group Literacy Network (2020) and by Barberia, Cantarelli and Schmalz (2020). However, as the epigraph above foreshadows, it is necessary to dream one (or many) more impossible dreams and keep fighting, even when it would be easier to give in. Thus, taking as a starting point the analysis of data collected from a work performed with

<sup>3</sup> "Impossible Dream" is a composition by Francisco Buarque de Hollanda, Mitch Leigh, Joseph Darion and Rui Alexandre Guerra Coelho Pereira. The song was composed in 1972, but recorded and released in 1975 in the album "Chico Buarque e Maria Bethânia Ao Vivo". (our translation)

students assisted by the *Acreditar* (Believe) Project, developed in a school of the municipal network of Rondonópolis, in the southeast of Mato Grosso, before 2020, the objective is to reflect on the impact of the pandemic triggered by the coronavirus in the learning of students, especially in the public education network.

This text consists of a report of an experience that, although it has been faced with various obstacles and difficulties, it has fought and - although it has not defeated the "invincible enemy" of illiteracy and social exclusion - has been successful in promoting learning with some students who were lacking knowledge in relation to the school year in which they were enrolled. Such experience is also thought of in this pandemic context that has deepened inequalities, exclusions, and marginalizations.

Thus, from data collected in the period from August to December 2017 and from April to July 2018, specifically with 4 children who were part of the *Acreditar* Project (which will be detailed in a specific section), reflections are woven about dreams and struggles of those who believe in flowers sprouting from the impossible ground.

### **Education in the context of the pandemic in Rondonópolis**

*It is my law, it is my question  
To turn this world, to dig this ground  
I don't care if it's too terrible  
How many wars I'll have to win for some peace  
(HOLLANDA et al., 1972, our translation)*

Pandemic. This term has become recurrent in our vocabulary, even if we did not understand it clearly. To get an idea, entering this word into the Google® search engine, in 0.51 seconds approximately 396,000,000 results appeared (10/08/2021, 8:40 AM).

Although the term was not created in 2019, there is no doubt that it is currently associated with the coronavirus, designated SARS-CoV-2, causing the disease COVID-19, which was so named in reference to the type of virus and the year the epidemic began: Coronavirus disease - 2019. With the rapid spread of this virus across continents, on January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO/WHO) declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

According to WHO data, as of October 7, 2021, "there have been 236,132,082 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 4,822,472 deaths, reported to the Organization. As of October 6, 2021, a total of 6,262,445,422 doses of vaccine have been administered" . These data demonstrate the impact of the pandemic in the world.

In Brazil, according to a survey done by the consortium of press vehicles about the situation of the coronavirus pandemic in Brazil, whose balance is made from data from the state health departments, until 8 pm on October 7, 2021, the:

The country counts 599,865 deaths and 21,532,210 cases of coronavirus since the beginning of the pandemic, according to the consortium of press media with data from health secretariats. The moving average is 438 victims per day and again pointed to a drop (G1, 07/10/2021 20:00)

Several actions were taken to contain and confront the spread of this virus around the world. In Brazil, among stumbles, delays, and mismatched information, the Health Emergency Operations Center (COES) of the Ministry of Health was created on January 22, 2020, and the National Contingency Plan for Human Infection by the new Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) was prepared ( BRAZIL, 2020).

In the state of Mato Grosso, by means of Decree No. 416, March 20, 2020, telework was instituted, the reduction of the workday and the relay in the public agencies of the state, which was also followed by the municipalities. From this document on, other decrees and norms were instituted as the disease advanced and, in mid-2021, its gradual reduction in deaths and contamination, added to the vaccination of the population.

In this context, initially, classes were immediately suspended in the entire state, municipal, and private school system in Mato Grosso; but the latter gradually installed hybrid education (face-to-face and remote classes) as of the second semester of 2020 and started the 2021 school year also offering this modality. With regard to school attendance in the public school system, the municipalities established different calendars and modalities, with the remote modality prevailing, while in the Mato Grosso state school system classes in the hybrid modality were only resumed on August 3, 2021, and the return to 100% face-to-face on October 18 of the same year.<sup>4</sup>

Regarding the city of Rondonópolis, also considering the need for social isolation as a measure to combat the coronavirus pandemic, Decree No. 9407 was published on March 17, 2020. In its Article 9, item III, it determined, on a mandatory basis, the "suspension of classroom activities in universities, colleges, vocational schools, pre-vestibular courses, preparatory courses in general, and institutions that hold training courses" (Rondonópolis, Decree No. 9407/2020).

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<sup>4</sup> Data compiled from information collected on the website of the Mato Grosso State Department of Education. Accessed at: <http://www3.seduc.mt.gov.br/-/18163383-mato-grosso-retoma-aulas-100-presenciais-momento-e-de-somar-forcas-pela-educacao-> Accessed on: 08 Oct. 2021

Due to pressure from the private sector, students, and family members, among other factors, changes to this decree occurred in May of that year, even as the virus spread and the number of deaths increased, with precarious hospital care for Covid-19 victims, still little known at that time. Thus, Article 3 of Decree No. 9,515 of May 7, 2020, although it kept classes suspended in most schools in the municipal network, now authorizes "for an indefinite period, in a controlled manner", the operation of various activities, among which are:

- XXI) classes in the municipal high school network;
- XXII) classes in the private high school network;
- XXIII) classes in public and private higher education courses;
- XXIV) classes at vocational, technical and training schools, pre-vestibular and preparatory courses in general, only for students 15 (fifteen) years old or older (RONDONÓPOLIS, 2020).

It is important to note that, during 2020, several decrees were established with advances and retreats in relation to the tightening and/or loosening of health security measures, impacting, also, on school attendance (notably private, since it was the first to establish remote and, later, hybrid education in Mato Grosso).

With the suspension of classes in the municipal school network of Rondonópolis, the "Beyond School Activities Program" (RONDONÓPOLIS, 2020) was published in the Electronic Official Journal (Diorondon-e) No. 4,705, on May 26, 2020 (pages 12 to 16).

The work methodology, as described in the Program itself, foresees only the use of printed activities:

The school units will be responsible for organizing the teachers and trainees to prepare the activities, deliver them to parents and/or guardians, receive, register and correct the activities, as well as answer questions that may arise in relation to the activities.

The Municipal Education Secretary will be responsible for guiding the professionals in the school units in the development of activities, monitoring the whole process, answering possible questions, and providing the necessary resources (RONDONÓPOLIS, 2020, p. 14)

As can be inferred - and the name of the program is also enlightening - the proposal involved the realization of printed activities, without classes (presential and/or remote), explanation of content or any other possibility of approaching the school content.

According to the schedule in the document, in the period from 05/27/2020 to 06/05/2020, the school units should "prepare the work proposal, as well as dedicate themselves to the preparation of the activities" (Idem, p. 15), while the return of the activities to the school

unit by the students, parents and/or guardians would occur in five stages, starting on 06/22/2020 and ending on 08/14/2020.

In 2021, the name was changed to "School Activities Program of the Municipal Education Network", published in the Official Electronic Journal (Diorondon-e) No. 4.880, February 11, 2021 (RONDONÓPOLIS, 2021). Here too, priority is given to the delivery and reception of printed activities, with a schedule establishing dates for this purpose, organized in fortnights.

With the implementation of this Program, the continuity of the school year was given by means of "workbooks" of activities prepared by the teachers and picked up by the parents and/or guardians of the students every two weeks. In case of doubts, questions were usually asked to the teachers, on their private cell phone numbers, through the WhatsApp® application, usually in message exchange groups corresponding to the students' classes or parents' groups, if they were from the early years, and in subject groups, if they were from the final years of elementary school.

The teachers answered the questions by means of audios or explanatory videos. In the next delivery, the parents/guardians would return the answered activities and get new material, and this happened during the entire school year of 2020 until July 2021, because, in August, when the July vacation came back, the classes returned in hybrid form.

In the Official Electronic Journal (Diorondon-e) No. 4.994, July 27, 2021, the "Plan for the Return to School Classes" was published, containing "Technical and Pedagogical Guidelines for the Plan for the Return to School Classes and the recommendations directed to Education Professionals, Parents and/or Guardians and Children/Students in the Municipal Education Network/RME" (RONDONÓPOLIS-MT, 2021, p. 10).

Blended learning has been a term used in this pandemic period to refer to different media that do not take place entirely (or entirely) in the school setting. Although the terminology is recurrent today, it was not created in 2020. As Michel Horn and Hearther Staker explain

Hybrid education is any formal educational program in which a student learns, at least in part, through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path and/or pace (HORN; STAKER, 2015. p. 34)

Despite the fact that in Brazil there is ample experience with distance, hybrid and other modalities beyond the one that has been structured over time in our reality, educational system, culture and relevant legislation, they have developed mainly focused on higher education and technical/technological training. As far as Child Education and the initial years of Elementary



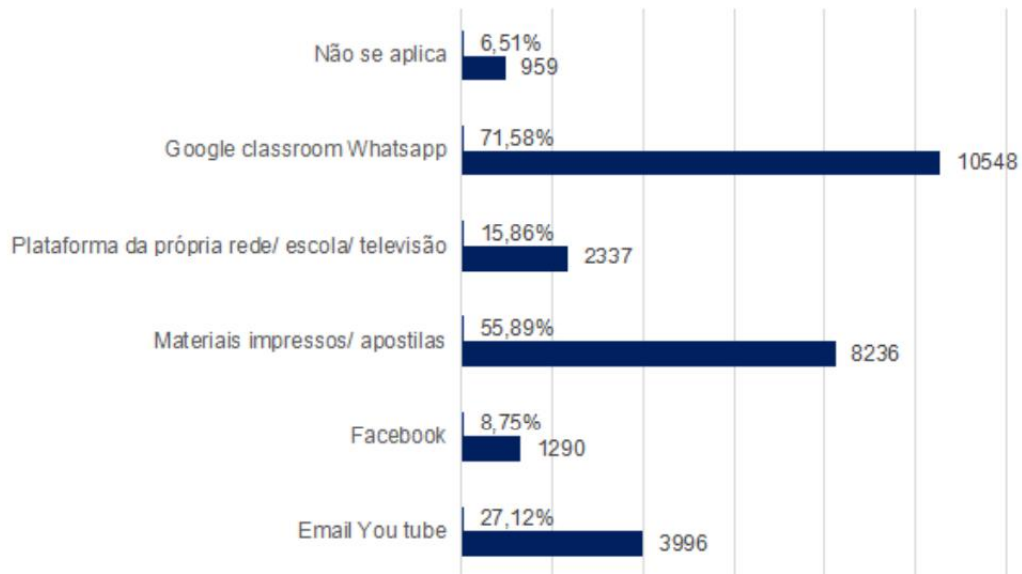
School are concerned, it was notably with the pandemic that this issue emerged in an emergent, urgent, and improvised way.

Even some existing programs and resources not used (or used by few) education professionals became part of the daily planning and teaching routine. To illustrate this statement, it is possible to mention some Google Apps resources, such as Google Classroom®, which is a content management system for schools launched to the public in 2014, and Google Meet®, which consists of a video communication service, started in 2017. In 2020 they were made available for free, although with some restrictions on paid "packages." Other tools were used to manage tasks, plan, create content, establish/maintain some communication channel between students and teachers in real time (synchronous activities) or not (asynchronous activities), among them WhatsApp®. Thus, mainly these resources were used during 2020 for the realization of "remote classes" to replace in-person classes in schools due to the covid-19 Pandemic, along with printed activities, since many students did not have the technological resources to participate digitally.

As for Rondonópolis' municipal network, what was practiced, in general terms, was one week studying in the classroom with the teacher and some classmates and the next at home, answering a "workbook" of activities. Therefore, there was no hybrid teaching with interaction through digital platforms, since many students did not have internet at home, much less technological resources to access it. In addition, some elementary school teachers only answered students' questions through audios sent by the WhatsApp application, unlike in Kindergarten, where teachers recorded explanatory videos about the content covered in the materials.

It is important to highlight that the precariousness, improvisation, and obstacles to emergency remote teaching were not phenomena limited to Rondonópolis. In general, we see that printed material (often referred to as handouts) was present in this process, combined with the use of other tools. The survey research developed by *ALFABETIZAÇÃO EM REDE*, which had 14,730 respondents distributed throughout all regions of the country, illustrates this statement.

**Graph 1** – Tools and platforms used in remote teaching<sup>5</sup>



Source: *Alfabetização em rede* Survey (2020, p. 192)

However, for a significant percentage of the national public network, the classroom has been transferred to the cell phone or computer screen,

Surprising, still, is the use of printed resources as an aid to remote teaching (in many contexts, remote teaching is restricted to sending printed activities for children to do at home, under the guidance of parents and/or guardians), around 55.89% [...]. The use of printed materials can be related to the school tradition itself, whose practices are based on these teaching aids, but can also be linked to the social inequalities that affect our students, largely excluded from technological tools and sociocultural and cognitive instruments essential to participation in remote synchronous processes (EM REDE, 2020, p. 192)

In this context of changes and new teaching adaptations, teachers had to, in record time, learn to use technological tools, buy new cell phones, computers, increase spending on broadband internet (where possible) and electricity in their homes, among other costs and investments so that they could record videos and audios and send them, as well as receive and archive them from their students.

To count as a school day, the family or guardian had to help the child to perform the activity, record the performance of the task, and send it in the classroom/discipline group to confirm that the activity was performed by the student himself. However, even with so much demand, there were still handouts that were not answered by the students but by other people. In other words, the precariousness of the teaching and learning process is evident.

<sup>5</sup> Não se aplica = Not applied, Plataforma da própria rede/escola/televisão = Own network/school/television platform; Materiais impressos/Apostilas = Printed material/coursebooks



## **Acreditar Project and student learning**

*And tomorrow, if this ground I kissed  
Is my bed and my forgiveness  
I'll know that it was worth delirious  
And die of passion*  
(HOLLANDA et al., 1972, our translation)

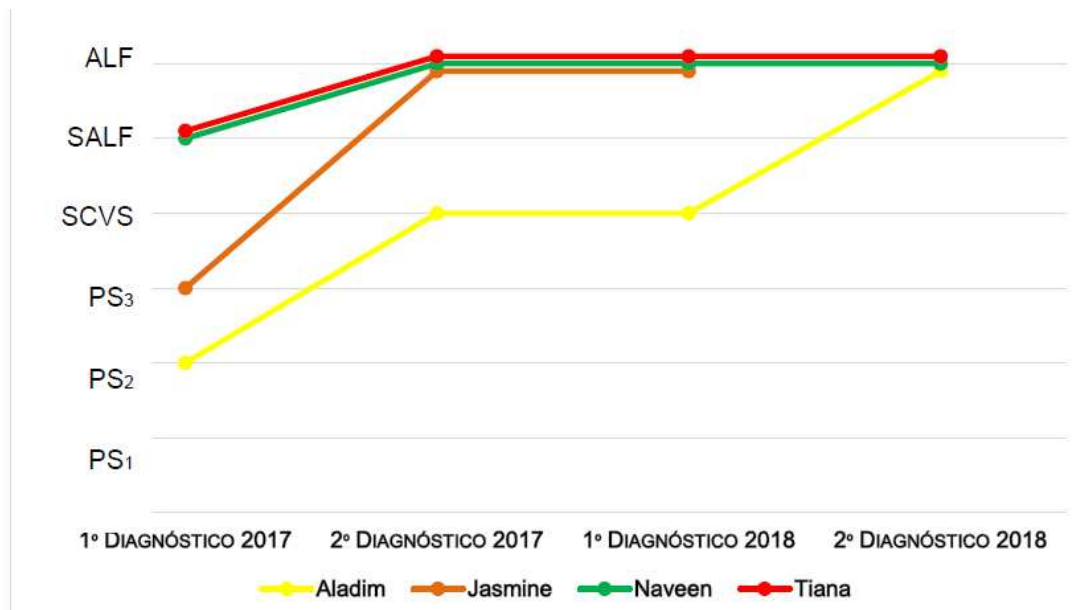
With the need for social isolation, abruptly the activities were interrupted, projects and programs were suspended or canceled. One of them was the Acreditar Project, which was developed in the Princesa Isabel Municipal School of Basic Education, in Rondonópolis - MT. This school is located in the outskirts of Rondonópolis and receives students from several neighborhoods in the city and rural area. Some challenges are posed to this unit, as they often move or miss classes due to their parents' change of job, transportation difficulties, domestic activities they need to perform, among other factors that contribute to the deepening of the learning gap in relation to the content of the phase/year they are studying and the school dropout, compromising the literacy process itself.

It was with an eye on these students and the difficulties they face to attend school, stay in school, and learn that, in 2012, the Acreditar Project was created. Its proposal involved differentiated classes in the afterschool, the use of concrete material, and attendance in small groups, usually formed by four students.

The classes were meaningful, because they were based on themes related to their experiences, prepared in the form of sequences of activities, which were planned taking into account the needs of each group, which was formed based on the stages they were in.

From 2012 to 2018, many students were assisted in the *Acreditar* Project and, at different paces, they progressed in their learning. In the following graph, the progress of a group that participated in a research-intervention is depicted. The data were collected between 2017 and 2018, with reference to the writing hypotheses: pre-syllabic, syllabic with no conventional sound value, syllabic with conventional sound value, syllabic-alphabetic, and alphabetic.

**Graph 2 – Evolution of research collaborators<sup>6</sup>**



Source: Conceição (2019, p. 145)

These students progressed in their learning driven by work that was different from what is usually proposed in the classroom, with particular strategies and assistance, use of children's literature books sent by the Ministry of Education (MEC) through the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (PNAIC), games developed by the Center for Studies in Education and Language (CEEL), and cut-and-paste activities with themes from the sequences of activities developed with them.

However, despite the relevance of the *Acreditar* Project for student learning, it was terminated and, in 2019, the management team developed another one focused on the use of educational games by teachers in the classroom.

In 2020, due to the pandemic, all the activities (Parents at School Project, Pedagogical Support Project, Citizen Athlete Project, Happy Child Project) that were being developed at that school were suspended to prevent the virus from spreading and to comply with the public health regulations established by the Municipal Health Secretariat.

This pandemic has brought countless physical, material, social, and emotional losses to everyone. But there is no doubt that the poorest were and are the most vulnerable. Many workers and breadwinners lost their jobs, their health, and even their families. In this scenario, children were also damaged. If analyzed only through the prism of school education, with the social distance they were deprived of contact with classmates and teachers (and of the many learning

<sup>6</sup> Diagnóstico = Diagnosis

experiences that take place in the process of interaction). Remote teaching was reduced to the delivery and return of printed materials, that is, the concern was centered on the content to be passed on. Learning was not placed on this agenda. By the way, even the term is reductionist, as it is remote "teaching", without the inclusion of the other side of this process: learning.

Thinking about children in vulnerable situations, the problem gets worse, since many parents and/or guardians are not literate to help their children with the activities sent. Moreover, to support the literacy process at home it is necessary to have at least some preparation for this purpose, resources, and adequate conditions.

With the start of hybrid teaching in the second half of 2021, it has been possible to observe how much these students have suffered. They are apathetic to learning and are often unmotivated, since they realize that even without learning the content required for the next phase/year, they will move on to the next one.

Thus, unfortunately, many children and adolescents report that staying at home and answering their textbooks is more comfortable and easier than going to school. It is unfortunate and worrisome that some students say that they only attend classes because of attendance, because if they drop out of school the Guardianship Council will go to their homes and this could bring consequences to their parents or guardians.

Adding to this context, unfortunately there are also teachers who are discouraged with their profession and do not feel capable or motivated to intervene in a positive and propositive way in this situation.

As for the public authorities, in addition to the data shown here, there is the inoperativeness to act in an adverse context to provide teachers and students with basic conditions for remote work, such as adequate equipment, teacher training, preparation of parents and/or guardians to support student learning, among other consequences of decisions and referrals at the municipal, state, and federal levels.

## Final considerations

*And so, no matter how  
The endless affliction will end  
And the world will see a flower  
Sprout from the impossible ground  
(HOLLANDA et al., 1972, our translation)*

With the pandemic of the new coronavirus and the need for social isolation, social inequalities have become even more pronounced, especially in regard to education, since, with the closing of schools and in order to continue the 2020 school year, which was drastically interrupted to avoid the proliferation of the virus, teaching became remote. In the case of the Rondonópolis municipal school system, as previously mentioned, the "workbooks" system was adopted.

In the state schools, remote classes took place virtually, through platforms such as Google Meet or Classroom, applications such as WhatsApp, and, for those students who did not have internet access, printed materials were made available.

In this regard, teachers had to, in a short period of time, learn to work with technological tools, acquire materials and make their own resources available so that the school year could continue.

It can be said that, in both networks, the results were not satisfactory, because the educational issue cannot be reduced to the non-interruption of the school year.

Among the impacts of the long time of distance of the students in relation to the school environment, of the lack of infrastructure and precariousness of the emergency remote teaching, it can be observed that many students don't want to go back to school, preferring to stay at home answering the "handouts" to have more free time; there are also those who are not interested in the school contents and don't participate in the classes (even having gone back to school), because they already know that there will be no failure.

If the pandemic period brought challenges and damages such as those discussed here, it is necessary and urgent to turn our attention to the learning and singularities of the subjects - teachers and students - for the next challenges. Among them, it is possible to highlight the motivation to teach and learn (not only school contents); to put the school in articulation with the networks it has built, since it has created communication channels with families and students, used media that were little explored in the educational process until then, and discussed the protagonism of teachers and students: such knowledge and constructions cannot be lost or replace the work done and that has been positive. The point is to add and re-signify, in permanent dialog.

Thus, special care must be taken with the teaching of students who have not advanced in their learning, as well as with their socioemotional needs and those of everyone involved in the teaching and learning process, so that it is possible to create "[...] a potentially motivating educational environment [...]" (GUIMARÃES; BORUCHOVITCH, 2004, p. 145).

Perhaps, for the world to see a flower sprouting from the impossible ground, it is necessary to believe that everyone can and deserves to learn, to rescue the joy in school, in the satisfaction that culture should and can provide to the students, as Snyders (1988) argued. In this sense, actions such as the Acreditar Project can be constituted as spaces for dialogue and learning, understanding the individual rhythms and needs, but within a collective project of (re)construction of a better and more inclusive post-pandemic school.

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