

Videocamp Film Fund 2018

Final Five Q&A: Fernanda Heinz Figueiredo, director of *A Sky For João*

Filmmakers from 29 countries applied to the Videocamp Film Fund 2018 with film proposals about inclusive education – and why inclusivity benefits everyone – in the hope of winning \$400,000 to make their film. Hundreds of entrants have now been narrowed down to the Final Five by the jury of filmmaking industry experts and inclusive education specialists, and they will announce their chosen project on 21st September.



One of the films in with a chance to win is *A Sky For João*, by Brazilian director Fernanda Heinz Figueiredo. We talked to her about her background in inclusive education and the meaning behind the title of her film.

How does it feel to be in the Final 5?

I'm excited and nervous, it's an important project! We all really need to reflect and act on inclusion, not only at school but in the whole of society. It's something we should be more advanced on, it frustrates me to know how slow changes are happening. So this is an opportunity to do something that really makes a change.

How did you start working around inclusive education?

I made a documentary called *Seeds From Our Garden* and during production I spent four years inside my old school, following the development of about 80 children. They've always practiced inclusion so when I was there as a child I had the opportunity to be with children with many different disabilities. That had a really positive impact on me, making me respect everyone for their abilities, not be uncomfortable about their difficulties.

What inspired your film?

I met Irene, the daughter of Regina, who is the producer of the film. She's very intelligent, very good with languages, and loves to sing. But she also has challenges — she uses a walker and wheelchair, she's within the autistic spectrum and has hyperlexia. Irene is now 11 years old and I followed Regina's fight for Irene to be accepted into a good school, which would work with her and her abilities, not try to fit her into boxes. I'm the creator of a film festival on education and childhood in Brazil, so I already knew about many stories around educational inclusion. Regina and I wanted to film a case study inside a school, to help public schools in Brazil to really

include children with disability. So we began to talk to other schools and organisations, in Brazil and abroad. We want to tell a story of the children and teachers, directors of schools and organisations, who have a common goal; to overcome with the bureaucracy and barriers we have in our society, the taboos, the lack of dialogue between people, to make a school truly inclusive.

The working title of the film is *A Sky For João*. What's the meaning behind that?

The Portuguese word for 'sky' is 'ceu'. CEU is also the acronym of a Centro Educacional Unificado, or Unified Educational Centre, like the CEU Quinta do Sol in São Paulo. It's a great place with swimming pools, sports facilities, cultural facilities, a cinema. It has all the resources that someone needs to really develop. But the school inside this campus, which calls itself inclusive, is not allowed to use these facilities. One of the students at that school is João, who is 6 and has cerebral palsy. He loves to sing and to dance but he doesn't have a chance because he is stuck in the classroom, where he is disruptive. It shows the problem of trying to make him adapt to the teaching and school structures, rather than adapting those to the needs of the students.

And you're going to look at other schools abroad too?

Yes, in Finland and in Germany. They have already tackled many difficulties to include a diverse spectrum of students, including children with disability and refugees. It's always a work in progress – no school is perfect. So we're not expecting the others to give the Brazilian school an exact recipe for how to make a school inclusive, we just want to give the schools the opportunity to learn from each other and share insights from the process that they are going through. In Finland the school had a lot of dialogue with the community, so parents of children who don't have a disability were also involved and included in the process. That's important so they understand how the school is being improved to benefit all the children, including their own.

What would you want audiences to take away from the film?

Films have the power to transform us. When a film put us in the shoes of a character, it touches us emotionally, and it's much easier to inspire change with a film if it touches us not rationally but in our hearts. I want the audience to relate to the characters in *A Sky For João*, so it humanises the issues and makes people embrace difference rather than fearing it.

About Fernanda Heinz Figueiredo

Fernanda Heinz Figueiredo is an award-winning director based in Brazil. Her first feature documentary, Sementes do Nosso Quintal, received the Audience Award for Best Brazilian documentary at the 2012 Mostra de Cinema de São Paulo, and at the 9th Festival du Film D'Éducation, Évreux, France, in 2013. The experience and success of the feature film led her to work in themes related to childhood, education and sustainable development, including the Aqui Se Brinca Award, the Show Pelo Direito de ser Criança by Sidarta and Unilever Institute, the series of short documentaries for children Território do Brincar, the Show Ciranda de Filmes, which she has created and produced since 2014, the documentaries Ideias para o Futuro da

Amazônia by Sustainable Planet, Bio3.8 currently in production, and several series about art and culture for Canal Arte1.