

Final Report on Volunteer Work at the Primary School Makuyuni

- Tim Krombach -

Summary of Events

Since the holidays ended, I continued to teach Mathematics in grade five and English in grades six and seven. Also, I gave further Talk-with-Tim-lessons. There, I shifted the focus to games and songs. The students liked both, playing games to practice their vocabulary and to sing songs in English. In the mornings, I was compiling the lessons of the day together with the teachers. After the lessons, I marked math exercise books.

Expectations and Plans

In the midterm report I stated that I wanted to improve my Kiswahili and take over more classes in the second half. Those two aims I definitely met, although I did not learn as intensively as at the beginning. I also wrote that I wanted to give a positive contribution to the students' life, if possible. Considering that some students told me they would cry when I leave, I regard this aim as achieved. Further, I wished that students could profit from my work. I doubt whether I could help the students to improve their English a lot, but I am sure that they enjoyed my lessons and so they profited from what I did somehow.

My plan to visit other schools in this area, in order to see if there are different approaches to teaching, went on well. I was welcomed at Naitolia Primary School, Lowassa Secondary and Tumaini Secondary School. It was nice to see how they coped with the conditions schools have to face in this area.

Pedagogy in Makuyuni

When was the engagement enlightening? What succeeded?

For my part, I enjoyed the lessons most when I could see that the students did understand something that they obviously did not get before. It is easy to tell from the students' faces and their behaviour if they have a clue or if they have no idea what is going on. In the math lessons I needed less and less oral preparation as how to explain certain topics. When I was done with marking and the students performed well, I accredited this also to the quality of my teaching.

Where did I meet personal and structural limitation?

In English it was difficult to pick up the students where they stand on the one hand and on the other hand stick to the curriculum. It was hardly possible to avoid situations where a task would leave them puzzled. Unfortunately, the tough timetable did not allow more than two afternoon lessons for Talk with Tim.

A big problem is that the pupils are so used to getting punished with a stick everytime they do something wrong that it is hardly possible to handle a huge class like grade 5 (100 pupils) without a stick. They feel like, as long as they are not beaten, everything is alright, although the teacher might be shouting in front of the class. This requires a massive rethinking of how to teach and a different lesson preparation. If the teacher was with me in class (maths), they did what was expected from them, but if I was suddenly left alone, there was sometimes chaos. So, after two very chaotic lessons when I was left alone unexpectedly, I thought about what I had learnt at university about the gamification of classes. With things like small math games I could easily summon their attention and get them practising their calculating skills intensively without them even realizing it. I tried to show this approach to the teacher, too. Also, letting the students explain two each other (one good with one bad student) showed good results.

Due to the vast number of students, it is hardly possible for any teacher to give individual feedback to the students. Also, the students lack learning opportunities. They have no other input than the English, their teacher provides them with (and that is often, unfortunately, not very much).

Though, there are some TV channels in English, but not many people watch them.

How is this Experience going to be influencing my future in private and working setting?

The life here was very tough many times, the daily routine as well as the time spent in school. Coming from a culture of privileged people, there were many sacrifices I had to make. But once I got used to the way of life here, I realized that I do not need many things that I took for granted before I left home. So, whenever I have to complain about how hard my life is in the future, I will think back to the African episode in my life and figure, that it is not that hard at all. It is hardly imaginable that the majority of people in this world live under circumstances like this and not like in Europe or America; That the "West", where we sometimes tend to believe to be the center of the earth and the earth being flat, is by far not the nucleus of mankind. This is a very enriching insight. I will take home so many impressions. Of all the welcoming people. Of the poverty. Of ways to cope with the conditions provided here. Of creativity the poverty fosters. Of dust. Of how much it is worth to live in a country without corruption. Of desperation. Of faith. Of a beautiful country. Of life.

5. Information for other Volunteers

If you come here as a volunteer teacher the first thing you should do is lower your expectations to yourself and to your environment. Get used to not knowing your students' names. Have patience. Don't take yourself too seriously. Laugh. Be openminded. Don't judge. Don't blame someone for the circumstances given.

6. Conclusion

I can only advise everyone to leave his or her usual environment to experience something like this. It is worth so much more than money could ever buy. Also, I think I could have studied endlessly but in the end I would have learned so many things as I experienced here. The journey made me a bit wiser, I think. Also, I am thankful now about many things I take for granted in my country. A free school education is an immense achievement. Also, freedom of speech, religion, love, etc. are things worth fighting for. To live in a country without everyday corruption is a privilege. "We" are not the focus of the world, although we might sometimes assume that.