

## Midterm Report of Volunteering at the Makuyuni Primary School

- Tim Krombach -

### **Motivation and Preparation in Germany**

My name is Tim Krombach and I am currently studying to become a teacher for secondary schools at the Justus-Liebig-University Gießen. My subjects are English, Maths and Music. When I am not studying, I enjoy making music, cooking, reading and having fun with my friends.

For a long time, I felt the urge to experience something apart from my daily routine. I have never been travelling alone for a longer time, as many of my friends did even back in school. So I sensed I was quite a bit under compulsion to do so. I did not want to wait until the end of my studies. I wanted to travel, meet new people and cultures and break out of my comfort zone immediately. I did not have any particular destination. Without the offer of Tandia, I might be somewhere totally else now.

So here I am, staying in Tanzania since the first of October 2016 and already having made a lot of crazy, wonderful, peculiar and mind-blowing experiences. I wonder what is still lying in front of me. Five weeks of holidays are near, which I will spend travelling and after that there are seven more weeks of school until I head home at the end of February 2017.

Makuyuni turned out to be a very small and also very local village. It is not comparable to a busy and humming city like Arusha. Life is slow here and, having been raised in a small village myself, I find that very comfortable. Here, it is easier to keep an overview of all the things that happen and the people I meet.

Being a very young organization Tandia e.V. has never sent any volunteers to Tanzania or anywhere else before me. Apart from that, I am also the first *mzungu* (european) to ever teach at the Makuyuni Primary School. This I find very exciting. Going a way, that has never been passed before.

On the one hand, I believe it is a good thing to help people with less good perspectives to improve their education and maybe even contribute something to the development of the educational system, which is definitely struggling in Tanzania, which even the teachers heavily confirm. On the other hand, I am also doing this for myself in great parts. In my opinion, learning to know another culture, meeting new people and adopting to new circumstances is a great possibility to enhance your own personality, to extend your horizon. If I can combine these two aspects it is a great thing, I think.

In Germany, I met Regina Meißner a few times for discussing preparational issues. I could drop most of my concerns in these meetings as she kept supporting me with useful information, repeating the unofficial Tanzanian motto: „Don't worry, everything will be fine.“ Which turned out to be true. There is always a solution for problems in one or the other way. I tried to learn a bit of Kiswahili in

Germany as it was my major fear not to understand anyone. That did not work out well since I did not find any teachers or courses anywhere. So I just decided to take a language course in the beginning of my stay and hoped everything would work out fine.

### **Personal Expectations for the Time in Makuyuni**

In the first place, I wanted to gather valuable, intercultural experiences. Learning to know new people and different ways of living, together with learning a new language seemed to be a likely way to achieve this aim.

Also, I wanted to apply many of the things that I learned at university. I was excited to find out about the conditions at the Primary School and what I could implement in class.

Further, I hoped to find out more about myself, finding unknown strengths and maybe weaknesses, interests or personal limits.

Finally, I wanted to pose something for people that they would appreciate and embrace. In other words, I wanted to do something good.

### **Personal Aims**

Obviously, I want to help improve the students' level of English. The teachers told me they also hoped to improve themselves if they had to speak more English in their everyday routine. When I came to school for the first time, I was shocked by the huge difference in teaching and learning culture to what I was used to from Germany. I knew it would be very different, but I did not expect it to be so immensely varying. For myself, I quickly identified the way of corporal punishment of the students as one of the main causes for their tremendously poor level of English. Since I believe that a positive learning atmosphere without fear is crucial for being successful as a student, especially in a foreign language classroom, this is what I would like to convey as far as possible. I believe who does not talk cannot improve. Who is afraid of punishment does not talk. Therefore, I keep preaching my philosophy to the students that making mistakes is ok and will not be punished. In discussions with the teachers they mostly agree to that view, but they refuse to withdraw from their punishing practice of hitting students with a stick, since they believe there is no other way to keep them „in line“. I find myself confirmed by the students' appreciation. So for the rest of the time I will continue discussing and advertizing alternative ways of sanctioning.

I would like to be remembered as a good teacher and not only because I am a *mzungu*.

### **My Every Day Routine**

Teaching English was very frustrating at the beginning. Most of the students did not have any clue what was going on in class. They did not understand what was written on the board, what the teacher was saying and what the lesson was about. Judging on their pronunciation difficulties

while reading out aloud texts from the text book in class, it is not possible they understood one whole sentence they were reading. To make matters worse, the level in the text books is way too high. Even I sometimes struggle with some of the vocabulary used in there. So how should the students be able to understand that? But the biggest problem is the teacher, who herself knows hardly more than the students. Her teaching style mostly consists of writing one exercise after another out of these exact books on the board and letting the students do it alone without any help or scaffolding. Also the level of English of the other teachers is not much better. I know this is not their fault but a systemic problem. No teacher at this school (even the headmaster) has been to university. If they would have been, they would probably have a well-paid job at a private school right now.

I knew I would have to lower my expectations on myself and the students compared to Germany, but I did not expect it to be so difficult. What bothers me most is the feeling of uselessness of the class. The problem I am facing is, that the students I am teaching are already in grade 6 and will be in grade 7 after the holidays. What they need, is a very basic instruction from the very beginning. What they are expected to know is absurd. So how can I give them what they need on the one hand without deviating from what is planned for them and will be demanded in the examination on the other hand? The answer is hard, I think. I just cannot. I have already lowered my aims to just leaving an impression of alternative ways of treating students, after I have gone. Maybe some students become teachers and remember that they preferred this kind of treatment when they were in school and practice it themselves as teachers.

Teaching maths is going unexpectedly well. My Kiswahili improves by every lesson and the things I do not know I write them down before so I can read them out. If I still need assistance, the teachers translates for me. But this is hardly ever necessary. If the students do not understand something I think it is seldom due to my level of Kiswahili but due to the demands they are exposed to. Also in math, the teaching conception is rather not what I consider sustainable. Further, there are just too many kids to focus on individual problems.

Apart from teaching English in grade 6 and maths in grade 5 I wanted to implement my very own kind of project. So, with the encouragement of the headteacher, I did. I set up two extra lessons on Monday and Thursday afternoon, each for one half of grade 6, and called it „Talk with Tim“. Also nobody might get the difference, I intentionally used „with“ instead of „to“ in order to point out my intention of focusing on dialogue rather than monologue in the title. I would like to activate the students' own creativity more and, by increasing the amount of students talking, shift the focus of the teacher as a protagonist in classroom to the students. I know this sounds good and very ambitious, but I thought it was worth a try. Having had the first two lessons of Talk with Tim, I can

say that this was something completely new to the students. I wanted to get them talking as fast as possible, so I decided to repeat most simple questions and sentences to introduce oneself. After six years of English, I thought this would be easy for the students. It was not. Some knew the answer to the question „how are you?“ and one or two understood „what's your name?“. So I started with questions like these, wrote them on the board together with the answers in a dialogue style and asked the students to practice this dialogue with a partner. Later, I wanted to ask them these questions freely and without order, so they could not just learn it by heart. It was really tough because the students were extremely shy to say anything, especially not loud. So I hope I can work on that after the holidays, take away some of their fear and make them talk more.

### **Aims and Wishes for the Rest of Time at School**

First of all, I would like to improve my Kiswahili. Second, I would like to give a positive contribution to the students' life, if possible. I also wish that the students can profit from my work. Further, in the second half of my stay I would like to visit other schools in this area, in order to see if there are different approaches to teaching. I would like to take over more classes. I am optimistic that the second half will be just as intensive and interesting than the first one