

It takes two and a half hours to fly to Iasi from Cologne-Bonn airport. But while driving to the first destination Vorona in Botosani district, time and distance between home and Romania seemed to be increasingly stretched. The roads through a beautiful landscape are poor, full of potholes, which you better drive around. The villages, which are mainly stretched out along the road, have not changed much since last time we were in this area of Romania 5 years ago, when we launched the project. The big difference is an enormous contrast that man himself has created. We see large and very large houses that are built between the old houses and just outside the villages. Really big houses! But a lot are standing unfinished. Many young people go abroad to look for work. When they have worked for one or two years, they come back and start building a house. When the money runs out, they start looking for work abroad again. Men and women alike, so we saw a lot of old people and children on the street and few people of the younger generation.



The first schools we visited are situated in Vorona. The founder and director of a vodka factory lives in this village and the headquarters of the factory is situated in this village. This woman is doing a lot to improve the quality of life in Vorona. It is very positive to see, but this is not the case everywhere. In other places it is not uncommon, that money is first of all spent on building a large and beautiful mayors office. Unfortunately, practices of the old socialist regime are still tangible for many people.



In Vorona we visited two schools. We first entered a classroom that had previously received material from Timmy Mouse. The children were already anxiously waiting and responded very enthusiastically to the newest book that we held in our hands. Really a very nice welcome! The teacher gave feedback about the other books. We could communicate in English, which made the conversation easier and more personal, because not everything had to be translated.

She was very positive about the materials and also very happy with the latest Timmy textbook. She was able to work

well with the materials. Also in the second group we had a very pleasant conversation. The books are in good use and the teacher was satisfied.

All teachers indicated that they had little or no good learning material. They had some kind of workbook from which they copied paper sheets, one for each child, on which children also could color, but otherwise had little educational value. This is the main reason, they were really happy to work with the Timmy Mouse material.



Playground in the back of the school





This visit was followed by an unexpected visit to a "gradinita" (kindergarten), that did not yet have any Timmy books. We had driven past this school on the way to Vorona.

The building looked good and almost idyllic, but appearance can deceive! A young teacher had been working in this school for 10 years. She spoke English well and was totally surprised that we were bringing books. We explained the educational project and she told us to look around in the classroom. All materials we saw in this classroom, she bought herself,

little by little! And salaries really aren't that high. But when she would leave this school, she continued, she would take everything back with her. In the cupboards we did see some puzzles, toys, games, stuffed animals and coloring books, which often is also donated by foreign foundations. This teacher copied sheets out of some kind of assignment book. However, we did not see books from which the children can get their necessary basic knowledge, to be able to grow and develop!

These educational textbooks of Timmy Mouse are more than welcome. Because we only carried the newest book with us, Brian is going to bring other Timmy books later this month.

*The situation in this pre-school is not a single case. In all other (pre)schools we visited, we experienced the same situation.*

*These are the moments and the places that make us realize that we must continue our work and must keep on trying to find funding to be able to print the whole package of Timmy Mouse educational material!*



The second day we visited a school and a home in Sceia (in Suceava district) where children are in day-care. Parents cannot take care of them sufficiently or the grandparents have to take care of the children and therefore send them to the home during the day. The home is supported by the church and there is a sister and a "social worker" present. Younger and older children attended this group and immediately they curiously started looking into the book!

During the next visit of a school, I honestly was a little surprised about the feedback of one teacher. She worked with the Timmy books, but was more conservative in views about the learning material. She preferred to see things that are known to the child, and indicated that the children, for example, do not know a circus seal. So she would see rather farm animals. (which are also in the books, because we try to create the material related to the child's own living environment, but new things will stimulate a child as well)

Also with "Counting with Timmy" she indicated that it soon became very difficult. For example, according to the "old learning system" in Romania, the children could take a few weeks to learn the numbers 1 - 5. I was under the impression that this teacher worked within the limits of the old system (only doing what is expected of you, following the rules) rather than stimulating the children and encouraging them to learn more. Over the years also Brian had some similar experiences, when a teacher would not accept our material because it did not have a government stamp on it. These things happen, but luckily most teachers are very positive about the initiative of this project.



Our visit to a school in Marginea on the third day was somewhat disappointing. In the group with the youngest children there was the teacher we also met 5 years ago. But I noticed the same thing as 5 years ago, she was more like a "babysitter" than a teacher and it could well be that she has not been trained to be a teacher, but has taken care of the children for this school over time. She was clearly concerned about the children, but I could not see a good and professional learning attitude. I asked her about the books we handed out 5 years ago. Too bad, she had given the books to the children to take home. I explained again that the books have to stay in the classroom to benefit the children, but I only got a smile back.

The teacher in the other classroom was nice, but seemed to hold back a little more than the other teachers we had met in the past two days. Getting a good feedback was a bit harder. I am aware of the fact that not speaking the same language can be a reason and in addition to that, this visit could also be somewhat intimidating for her. Nevertheless, it was very interesting to see how the materials are handled in different schools. And that is of course the very purpose why we are visiting schools in Romania.

#### The conclusion:

It has been really very valuable to visit the schools and to be able to talk to the teachers. In this way a realistic picture has been created about the progress of this project.

More work still has to be done. I will develop a more comprehensive manual for the teacher with extended information, based on the experiences of this visit.

Most teachers will get the meaning of the instruction at the beginning of each book and in the manual, but other teachers will certainly benefit from getting extended information about the learning material and how to handle the books.





Developing and creating a workbook for the children is planned as well. Children have been writing in books which is not the intension of the learning books. For example, the way how to work with the books will clearly be mentioned in the manual.

The learning cards are a big succes for the youngest children. To develop a new set of cards would make sense and would be greatly appreciated by teachers as children alike!

But one thing is paramount during this visit, we remain committed to print the Timmy Mouse textbooks and cards! At the same time, this means that we must continue to work on applications to receive grants. This is proven to be the hardest part of the work and we are very grateful that thus far the project has been able to move on step by step!

In all pre-schools we experienced the lack of learning materials for children! More than words were the happy and curious glances of the children when we came in with the books.

Children should be able to get a chance to learn and to develop. This is an investment in their future. In our country, the Netherlands, this is naturally, in this part of Romania unfortunately not.



**So....Timmy Mouse.....”go for it”**

This is the full report of our working visit to Romania, to see how the Timmy Mouse Educational Project is developing.

I would like to state that we financed this working visit ourselves. No funds are used from the St.RCHF, or the project account.

If you should still have some questions, please, feel free to contact me on my e mail address. I will answer your questions as soon as possible.

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