

An Expert Interview

Dr Reinhard Markowetz is a professor at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich.

Before Markowetz received his Ph.D. at Hamburg University, he was a special-education teacher in southern Germany. Hereafter, he became a lecturer at the Department of Special Education at the University of Koblenz-Landau and the Institute of Special Education at Basle University. From 1998 onwards, Markowetz worked at the Pädagogische Hochschule in Heidelberg (University of Education) and in 2002 he took up teaching at the Catholic University of Freiburg as a professor for Special Education/Inclusive Education. Subsequently, he was Visiting Professor of Social and Inclusive & Education at the Alpen-Adria University in Klagenfurt. Until his appointment to Munich University, he was Dean in Freiburg.

Besides numerous other professional activities, Professor Markowetz is a member of the refie scientific advisory board.

refie coordinator (rc): Professor Markowetz, thank you for taking the time for our interview. To start with, we would like to know how you, as a member of the advisory board, would judge the *refie* project's progress up to now?

Reinhard Markowetz (RM): Before going into detail: very positively! First of all, the international *refie* team had very limited time for planning and organizing the collaborative research with the local colleagues. After this came a short period for data collection in Malawi and Guatemala, followed by data cleaning and analysis. In the light of this tight schedule, the achievements of the team must be very highly recognized. The data analysis has not been finalized and the final report is not yet available, but the preliminary findings are very promising. Strongly based on the qualitative research paradigm, the findings of nearly 250 interviews and 10 case studies with random field observations in Malawi and Guatemala will enable an internationally comparative discussion. Together with analysed data material on inclusive education in both countries, the results were carried over to a meta-level and grouped into seven main theses. Of course, as a scientist, I would always wish for more empirical data and statistics from the sphere of action. This additional data could reflect even better the social reality and the strengths and weaknesses of inclusive education. However, dynamic-procedural monitoring and evaluation would have been required over a longer period; and this time was not available for the *refie* project.

rc: At the last meeting of the scientific advisory board in October in Hanover, the *refie* team presented preliminary results from the research. Were any of those findings outstanding or very surprising to you?

RM: For me there were no real surprises. If you know where the problems lie and the implementation of inclusive education reaches its limit, you can anticipate the results. However, if findings confirm these hypotheses, the research project was important alone for the reason that now data-based conclusions can be drawn for making good improvements. Thus, it is good to have proof that for the inclusion of all children, still not all needs are being anticipated. Implementation difficulties are influenced by culture and closely linked to poverty. This should be taken as seriously as the result that there is still a lack of good communication and coordination amongst stakeholders. They should be making inclusion happen but, in practice, their struggle with misconceptions and differences in understanding is producing grave inconsistencies in inclusion. The project also confirmed that the global objectives of inclusion cannot keep up with the local opportunities to implement them. This is a negative and frustrating experience, but it also reveals obvious fields for future interventions. Consequently, it is not surprising to have found out that at local level inclusion is associated with access to education, and not with the acceptance and attendance of school classes. This is a clear indication that quality development and quality assurance have not yet taken place in inclusive education. It should be accepted that – for example, on the questionable concept of Resource Centers in Malawi – the debate should be kept up on whether and how special schools should have a transmitter function; or even whether special schools could rank as a first step towards inclusion. This shows how fragile and dispersed the understanding of inclusion is.

rc: Professor Markowitz, you are engaged in a project network on inclusive education, called "Inclusive Education in Action - Worldwide Experiences". The network aims "to provide valuable resources for the development of justice and equal opportunities in the world's education systems" to policy makers at European and international level. What does this mean, and how you are personally involved in this network?

RM: Yes, that's right. Klaus Jahn, CEO of Africa Action Germany and I got the project off the ground. In 2009, many countries ratified the UN-CRPD. Article 24 Inclusive Education gave a new push to the Millennium Development Goals and the United Nations Programme "Education for All". This made us think that it would be useful to take a look at the inclusive developments, both practically and theoretically, in an internationally comparative way. For a regular exchange of experiences, to learn from each other and for mutual strengthening, we wanted to network at least a few of the relevant projects from around the globe. Together with many well known partners in development cooperation, such as Light for the World, the Peter Ustinov Foundation, the cbm (Christoffel Blindenmission), and also thanks

to the financial support of the BMZ, we were able to initiate five inclusive education projects in five countries (Bolivia, India, Ghana, South Africa and Burkina Faso) on three continents, and network them with each other. The developments in each individual project in a certain district or a selected region are very exciting and worth being investigated in depth. However, we run a one-week meeting annually with representatives from all the projects and, increasingly, with the stakeholders. The first meeting was held in 2013 in South Africa, the second in 2014 in Ghana and Burkina Faso, and in 2015 we will meet in India. The final meeting in 2016 is planned to be held in Bolivia. During the meetings, all the project representatives, and others involved in inclusion, have the opportunity to get to know the local projects first-hand and to discuss the developments – positive and negative – in situ. It is wonderful to feel the international solidarity and to hear from one another that colleagues are struggling with pretty much the same issues all over the world. Apart from this more emotional aspect, the intense discussions, the exchanges on small and large developments, and the realistic suggestions generated therefrom, give the great added value of this kind of project. It allows each and every participant to go back to their own project, to reconsider its practice on the ground, to be reassured, or to make new decisions for the work there. It is on this interaction and synergy that the network lives as a whole; and the individual projects as well. This productive exchange of experiences on the status and progress of the country projects adds value to and enriches the conceptual developments. It is extremely motivating and helps to master the challenges of inclusive education. Our research network is still desperately looking for funds to allow us to systematically and scientifically accompany our university partners in five countries into a next phase. For long-term use and benefit, the strategies for the implementation of inclusive education at district level need to be evaluated by means of empirical studies. Policy makers should be put in a position to make evidence-based decisions.

rc: From the perspective of your longstanding research experience, what are the success factors for IE?

RM: This is a tricky question, but the sum of my experiences makes me believe that it is rather the soft factors that make inclusion fly. At the end of the day, it's the attitude and state of mind of the teachers, head teachers and school administration that can convince parents and pupils that playing, learning and working in mixed ability classes is possible and not to anyone's disadvantage. Very often, the diversity can well be experienced as an asset. Wherever people commit themselves to inclusion and recognize it as a human right, ways forward will be found. Where there is good communication and coordination at local level, alliances will develop and coalitions will form between representatives of the educational, social and health ministries, as well as in municipal and urban governance. In this way, the voices of those affected, their families and self-help groups will not only be heard but they will be actively integrated. Plans will evolve, responsibilities arise, creative space open out – and inclusion can fly. This is hard work, but it is what development

cooperation should be aiming to strengthen through financial and structural support. The reforms for inclusion that we think about on a global basis will follow on its heels, because they are not determined by others, but are designed and made locally, and they are likely to be sustainable!

rc: *refie* works in the two pilot countries, Malawi and Guatemala. From your experience in similar contexts: What are the special challenges you see for the success of IE in these countries?

RM: Well, to secure inclusion on a long-term basis and to lead education for all into the future as normality is actually challenging enough. Building and developing a high quality, inclusive education system is not only a challenge in Malawi and Guatemala, but there are many other countries facing similar problems. It's a global issue that we need to increase awareness of the interfaces, not only between education and rehabilitation, medicine, social and health care, but also with architecture, jurisprudence, religion and other social disciplines and sectors. The bundling of the disciplines determines the coexistence and collaboration of humankind, and we need to become more conscious of their connections and associations. The educational outcomes of marginalized children depend largely on early recognition and childhood support, rehabilitation treatments, the right therapies, and the predominant conditions in the family. Therefore, systematic ways are required to strengthen parents and make them aware of the educational needs of all their children. However, this alone will not be enough. In order to lead them out of social disgrace and disrespect, you need an operational, community-based system of early intervention and childhood education. On the basis of the general rights of children, pre-school inclusion must be comprehensively introduced and organized. For this purpose, the shortage of skilled workers must be overcome by means of developing and expanding vocational training in teaching and therapeutic professions. In schools, though, there are still many challenges to face. To do justice to the growth in population, many new schools will have to be built and put into operation. In addition, the issue of teacher shortages has to be addressed. Teaching must be elevated to an important and socially esteemed profession, and an attractive career. It needs to be professionalised and perhaps even become (more) academic. The teachers who should work "inclusively" in the future must be adequately qualified. School principals, school authorities and representatives from ministries must learn more about inclusion, not only to bear responsibility for the inclusive school development, but also to ensure long-term success as a promoter. In addition, the professionalism of governments, agencies and local authorities has to be ensured in order to make the issue of inclusion a public responsibility, so that it can spread widely into the population. With all these efforts, the people affected, marginalized groups, self-help organizations, lobbyists and advocates on their own behalf, must be embraced and granted wide-ranging opportunities for participation. The equipment in the school buildings, and the infrastructure of the schools, are to be improved. The mostly overloaded and out-dated curricula have to be rewritten in

an inclusive manner. New teaching and learning methods should be developed and filled with life to make learning effective for all children. Finally, it must be ensured that stakeholders adhere to the targets and schedules manifested in their action plans. Inclusion needs to advance on schedule and remain within the budget made available to countries from the development cooperation funding. This will ensure progress and make sustainability achievable.

rc: If you had one wish for unfolding and further developing inclusive education, what would you wish for?

RM: It's about education for all ...

... and it's now far beyond only getting the present "big losers" of education into the system by means of inclusion. Inclusion should not, and cannot, allow marginalized children and young people to fail due to inadequate educational opportunities. Pre-schools and schools must therefore implement high quality education and secure it permanently. This will make these places a long-term, effective learning environment for all children. This is a very large task for all those who want to develop our educational landscapes into sustainable, high-grade future investments. My wish is that research should play a much greater role in the whole process of putting into practice inclusive pedagogy and didactics. Despite the urgency to use the money in the field, research projects should be funded to provide evidence on the quality of inclusive education by means of empirical studies and analyses.

rc: Thank you very much, Professor Markowitz!

Some *refie* relevant publications of Professor Markowitz:

1. MARKOWETZ, R.: Inklusion und soziale Integration von Menschen mit Behinderungen. In: CLOERKES, G., Soziologie der Behinderten. Eine Einführung. Unter Mitwirkung von REINHARD MARKOWETZ. 3., neu bear. und erw. Auflage. Heidelberg (Universitätsverlag C. Winter Edition S) 2007, 207-278.
2. MARKOWETZ, R.: Handlungsforschung als komplexe Methode und qualitatives Design zur Lösung sozialer Probleme von Menschen mit geistiger Behinderung In: JANZ, F./TERFLOTH, K. (Hrsg.), Forschung im Kontext geistiger Behinderung. Heidelberg (Winter – Edition S) 2009, 279-303.
3. MARKOWETZ, R.: Inclusive Education: Schulentwicklung in Burkina Faso/Westafrika. In: PETRA FLIEGER, VOLKER SCHÖNWIESE (Hrsg.), Menschenrechte, Integration, Inklusion. Aktuelle Perspektiven aus der Forschung. Bad Heilbrunn/Obb. (Klinkhardt) 2011, 131-136.
4. MARKOWETZ, R./BATIONO, J.C./COMPAORE, F.: Inclusive Education in Burkina Faso – Wissenschaftliche Begleitung und evidenzbasierte

Evaluation der Implementierung und Sicherung inklusiver Bildungsqualität in der Modellregion Garango. In: LEONHARDT, A. (Hrsg.), Die UN-Behindertenrechtskonvention – Umsetzung und Auswirkungen weltweit. Bad Heilbrunn (Klinkhardt) 2014 (In Druck)

5. MARKOWETZ, R./JAHN, K./TITZE, J.: Inclusion: Rethinking Education for All - “Promising Practice in Inclusive Education”. Background Paper for the IWGE Meeting 2014. Bonn/Berlin (GIZ) 2014

