

Building an inclusive education system - Reflecting on the last two decades and the major reform agenda

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Abstract

Based on the book commissioned by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) focused on exploring the evolution of special education in Ireland from 1922-2022, this presentation reflects on the last two decades and considers key elements of the major reform agenda that have impacted on the experiences of children and young people with special educational needs. The exploration is contextualised within the broader societal context of the past two decades including government policy and the emergence of an enlightened rhetoric underpinned by a rights-based approach. A number of milestones associated with the reform agenda are identified and include the establishment and evolution of the National Council for Special Education, the Research-led Agenda, Professional Preparation, Approaches to Resource Allocation, Investment in Special Education Provision and Inter-departmental Policy-making. In looking to the future, the presentation considers the potential implications of Education as a Resource-dependent Right; the need for a Robust Legislative Framework; the benefits of a Wrap-around system and providing Opportunities beyond School. The presentation ends with a consideration of how an inclusive education system might be built in the future based on our experiences to date.

Bio

Prof Emer Ring is Dean of Early Childhood and Teacher Education at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. Previously Emer was Head of Department of Reflective Pedagogy and Early Childhood Studies. Emer's teaching experience spans the role of mainstream primary teacher, literacy and numeracy support teacher and teacher of children with special educational needs. Emer has also worked as a senior Department of Education inspector across early intervention, primary, post-primary and special school settings. As Dean, Emer currently leads and manages one of the largest education faculties in Ireland, which provides a wide range of programmes from early childhood to post-primary at undergraduate and post-graduate levels. Emer has engaged in lecturing, undergraduate, post-graduate and practicum supervision across various programmes. Emer has led a wide range of research in education related to early childhood, primary, post-primary, and special school contexts, including presenting at conferences and seminars nationally and internationally and publishing widely. Together with colleagues, Emer led the design, development and evaluation of the multiple-award winning [Leadership for INCLUSION in the Early Years \(LINC\) Programme](#) focused on supporting inclusion in early childhood settings. Emer also

volunteers as a Director of the National Autism Charity, AsIAm and is a member of the board of management of Redhill Special School.