

## Editorial

The publication of this issue of REACH marks two very significant developments in the history of the Journal namely a change in title and the move to open access online publication at the [website https://reachjournal.ie](https://reachjournal.ie)

REACH Journal has been published biannually since 1987 and in this period has changed its title three times. Initially *REACH: Journal of the National Association of Teachers in Special Education*, in 1989 it changed to *REACH: Journal of the Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education* reflecting the change in the name of its founding organisation to the Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education (IATSE). In 1992 the title changed to *REACH: Journal of Special Needs Education in Ireland* and from Volume 34 (2021) REACH is the *Journal of Inclusive Education in Ireland*. This recent change is the result of lively debate over several years at the Editorial Board alongside discussions with the Central Executive Committee of IATSE.

In all these deliberations the members of the Editorial Board were very keen to retain the title and concept of 'REACH' maintaining the historical link with the aims of the Journal as initially described by the Founding Editor, the late Sean Griffin

*Special Education has always involved a special reaching out. Primarily it has been a response to the reaching out of children with special needs who despite their disabilities or impairments stretch forward to seek their fullest potential. As teachers we draw from their optimism, trust and resilience in our reaching out to assist them...The journal REACH borrows from that challenge in its aim to help teachers in special education draw professional strength from reaching out to each other (1987, p. 4).*

Notably the change in title also reflects the aspiration articulated in that very first editorial that "*As our awareness of special educational needs becomes broader, stretching beyond the confines of segregated or semi-segregated provision to the ordinary classroom, it is essential that special education must be seen as the responsibility of all teachers* (Griffin, 1987, p. 4). Almost thirty five years after these words were written, rather than thinking in terms of a dichotomy between 'special needs education' and

inclusive education' REACH recognises the need for education to be inclusive of all while also acknowledging difference. Thus the mission of REACH is above all about enhancing the educational experience of children and young people with special or additional needs for whatever reason, wherever they are educated, and by whom.

Moving to online open-access publication should broaden and increase the readership base, improve awareness, recognition and circulation of the REACH journal and increase accessibility through full online presence all key to enabling the achievement of the Journal's aim. At the time of writing all the journal content from Volume 14 to date is available at reachjournal.ie and plans are underway to make the remaining content available in the coming months. Thank you to IATSE for supporting and funding this project and to my fellow editorial board members for making this happen.

This issue of REACH features four articles focused on supporting the inclusion in education of learners with autism. In the first of these Davy and Tynan consider teachers' perspectives in relation to how aspects of the physical and temporal classroom environment can support pupils with autism. The articles by O'Síoráin et al. and Twomey et al. both focus on supporting classroom communication with young children with autism. O'Síoráin et al. draw on case study data to invite education professionals to reflect on how they connect and communicate with young children with autism in the classroom. Twomey et al. consider the challenges experienced by young children with autism as they transition to early education settings and the role of the creative arts in supporting inclusion. It is notable that the balance of agency in the learning environment and the recognition that all children have a voice are key themes in both articles. Finally Corcadden and Casserly consider the identification of autism in girls, and the impact of gender differences on social acceptance of autism traits and the masking of social difficulties.

As we begin to emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic there is a renewed awareness of the critical importance of education for all children. However, education professionals are also acutely aware that prolonged school closures and the restrictions on learning environments have had particularly negative impacts on many vulnerable children and young people with complex learning needs. With greatly increased accessibility *REACH: Journal of Inclusive Education in Ireland* will be even better

placed to support all who work with learners whose education has been most disrupted and negatively impacted by Covid-19. Working together we can continue to achieve the aims of those forward-thinking individuals who established first IATSE and then REACH and

*provide a forum for new ideas and a stimulus for change, an exchange mart for effective practices, an opportunity to influence others, an ear for those who need one, renewal for weary spirits, reassurance for those who are uncertain of their worth, perspective for those who live too near the wood, a touchstone for those who may have forgotten that they need one, inspiration for those who do not find it nearer home, optimism for those in danger of losing it, a jolt for those who may not have noticed prejudice slipping into the place of truth, satisfaction for those who help to make good things happen, affirmation that membership of the human family endows each person with unique and equal value and confirmation that there is no member of that family whose life cannot be changed by good teaching (McGee, 1994, p.6).*

For many years REACH Journal has provided an opportunity for those involved and interested in inclusive and special education to publish articles based on their research, practice and experience. We particularly welcome submissions from education practitioners and contributions reflecting the views and experiences of learners with a diverse range of abilities along a continuum of need. See <https://reachjournal.ie> for submission guidelines and template, contact the editor [reach\\_editor.iatse@gmail.com](mailto:reach_editor.iatse@gmail.com)) to discuss possible submissions and follow the Journal on Twitter @ReachJournal.

## **ANNA LOGAN**

Editor

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### **References**

- Griffin, S. (1987) Editorial, *REACH: Journal of the National Association of Teachers in Special Education*, 1, 1, 4.
- McGee, P. (1994) *Foreword*. Irish Association of Teachers in Special Education, Celebrating 25 years. Publication marking the Silver Jubilee of IATSE.

The Editorial Board and the Central Executive Committee of IATSE extend sincere sympathies to the family, friends and colleagues of the late Jean Loy (RIP) who recently passed away following a short illness. Jean was for many years a teacher at St. Joseph's Special School Tallaght, a member of the IATSE CEC and REACH Journal Administrator.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a hanam.