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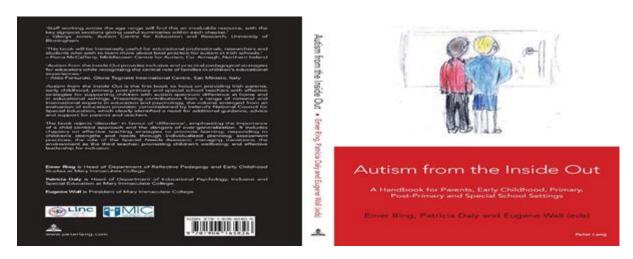
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How can we avert the Citation-Based (H Index) Crisis?

Dr Emer Ring, co-author of Autism from the Inside Out

Increasingly in Higher Education globally, accountability and impact are measured largely with reference to the Citation-Based (H Index). While citations in prestigious journals have an important role to play in contributing to scholarship, demonstrating accountability and establishing impact, they are in danger of overwhelming the range of other possibilities that exist for Higher Education to demonstrate accountability and establish impact. Paradoxically, one of the possibilities, in danger of being engulfed in the citation-based crisis is books!

As academics, we have an ethical obligation to our respective disciplines in ensuring that we define and defend the parameters of accountability and impact, rather than having these parameters imposed externally on us. This ethical obligation is at the core of the forthcoming Peter Lang Publication: 'Autism from the Inside Out: A Handbook for Early Childhood, Primary, Post-Primary and Special School Settings'.



As academics committed to research-led practice, we are accountable for operationalising research findings and ensuring that those participating in the research and those directly affected by the focus of the research benefit most from the process. This becomes an imperative in special education research, where children and families continue to experience exclusionary practices in our education systems. In essence, democratising evidence is critical to ensuring that research findings are leveraged to improve the quality of children's, parents', teachers' and schools' experiences, in addition to being readily accessible to fellow academics and policy-makers. Otherwise, there is a danger that research findings will remain under-explored, insufficiently interrogated and the preserve of a select few.

Following a multi-method empirical evaluation of education provision for students with autism aged 3–18, funded by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), in Ireland (Daly and Ring et al. 2016), a number of the researchers were concerned to operationalise the findings and allow those directly affected by autism access to the evidence.

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Drawing by a child with autism in primary school who participated in the research by Daly and Ring et al. 2016

Together with Peter Lang, the researchers have compiled a handbook, detailing the implications of this research for practice across early childhood, primary, post-primary and special school settings (Ring, Daly and Wall 2018). The handbook is based on a Key Signpost model and underpinned by a robust theoretical framework. Propelling the model is a rejection of autism as a 'disorder' in favour of adopting a position of 'difference' and understanding the social-communication: flexibility of thought and behaviour and sensory challenges associated with autism as differences to be acknowledged, understood, celebrated and accommodated (American Psychiatric Association (APA) 2013).

The first six chapters of the book address the key components of creating an enriched, responsive and appropriate teaching and learning environment for children with ASD. The concluding six chapters focus on the critical elements of creating inclusive cultures in education settings and the role and impact of effective management on ensuring quality education provision for children with autism. Adam Harris, CEO, AsIAm (https://asiam.ie/) , writing in the Foreword to the book, observes that

'Too often excellent research never converts to any real practical purpose from the point of view of families on the ground, this text harnesses a number of years hard work into something we can all learn from. In the course of my own work as an autism advocate I have the opportunity to visit many schools and so often see excellent examples of inclusion that you would love to 'bottle' and bring to every school. This book, which is built on data from the research carried out by Mary Immaculate staff as part of the National Council for Special Education's Autism Policy Advice, does just that, highlighting examples of good practice which can be employed in any early years' setting or school'. (p. xiv-xv).

With the publication of 'Autism from the Inside Out', we have just begun the journey in averting the threatening citation-based crisis in Higher Education and focusing instead on intelligent accountability and impact. The London School of Economics (LSE) Public Policy Group defined research impact as 'a recorded or otherwise auditable occasion of influence from academic research on another actor or organisation' (p.3). We look forward to the future where accountability and impact are evaluated as occasions of influence, both on scholarship and on those most affected by the research rather than exclusively derived from citation-based numerical calculations.

Adam Harris will launch 'Autism from the Inside Out' at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick on Saturday September 15th next.

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Dr. Emer Ring is Head of the Department of Reflective Pedagogy and Early Childhood Studies at Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Limerick and co-editor of 'Autism from the Inside Out' with her colleagues, Dr. Patricia Daly and Professor Eugene Wall. In addition to the editors, the book has contributions from a wide range of experts in education and psychology at Mary Immaculate College: Dr. Michele Dunleavy-Lavin; Dr. Margaret Egan, Claire Griffin, Sarah Feeney, Dr. Johanna Fitzgerald, Shirley Heaney, Dr. Stella Long, Anne O'Byrne, Dr. Lisha O'Sullivan, Marie Ryan, Sharon Skehill, Dr. Fionnuala Tynan and Professor Eugene Wall.

Emer previously worked as an early years (infant), primary and special education teacher and a senior inspector with the Department of Education and Skills in Ireland. Emer has been principal investigator on a range of national research projects and her research interests include education policy and practice, the teacher education continuum, inclusion, pedagogy and autism.