Liam Minihan Lecture

Planned for May, 2014

Liam Minihan (pictured) was Head Teacher at the Education Unit in Limerick Prison until his untimely death in 1994. He played a pioneering role in the development of curriculum in prisons and the integration of educational efforts with those of the larger Prison Service. His contribution to prison education has been honoured annually by the organisation of a memorial lecture.

The Irish Prison Education Association is reviving the Liam Minihan lecture in 2014 with talks by two academics, each of whom completed PhD research on prison education recently.

Jane Carrigan’s PhD with St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, was titled Prisoner Learners’ Perspectives of Prison Education within the Total Institution of the Prison: A Life History Methodological Approach. It involved in-depth interviews with men engaged in study in Mountjoy, St. Patrick’s Institution and Limerick Prison. She gained insight into their learning experiences, but also a sense of the severe ‘mortifications’ being in prison involved for them. She made recommendations for penal and educational policy and practice.

The PhD by Geraldine Cleere of Waterford Institute of Technology is entitled Prison Education, Social Capital and Desistance: An Exploration of Prisoners’ Experiences in Ireland. To explore the relationship between prison education and ‘desistance’, Geraldine interviewed, not just those in education, but also non-participants. She spoke to men in Mountjoy, Shelton Abbey and Pathways. She found "strong connections between prison education and the formation of pro-social bonds which… play a role in the desistance process".

Each of these studies is full of the voices of men who are, or have been, in prison. And each affirms the potential of prison education to help its students develop in deep and profound ways - ways that cannot be adequately measured through formal qualifications.

May, 8th, 2014
6:30 p.m. (Tea/Coffee)
7:00 p.m. Lectures
Wynn’s Hotel, Lwr. Abbey St, Dublin
Editorial

The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) reveals fascinating information about literacy levels nationally and how we compare with other countries. The previous OECD international survey, the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) had revealed that (using a scale of 1-5) nearly one quarter of the population in Ireland has literacy levels rated at the lowest level (Level 1). That survey drew attention to the association between low levels of literacy and low levels of participation in second chance education and training.

Prisoners were however excluded from participating in both IALS and PIAAC. In 2003, Mary Kett (a former teacher in Wheatfield Prison and recently retired from the Department of Education and Skills) and Professor Mark Morgan (St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra), conducted the Prison Adult Literacy Survey which set out to replicate the International Adult Literacy Survey within the Irish Prison system. By doing so it was possible to compare results between the prison and the general population. This comparison revealed that the Irish prison population has a much larger group with very poor literacy skills compared to the general population and the survey provided the empirical basis to support the position that those in prison in Ireland have particular educational requirements.

The results from IALS had a tangible impact on education and learning policy in Ireland and Morgan and Kett’s 2003 work added greatly to what we know about prisoners and their educational needs. To this end, it would of great benefit if PIAAC was replicated among our prison population. To do so however draws attention to how literacy is now understood by PIAAC to include use of digital technology and communication tools. This understanding has important implications for the Irish Prison Service. All learners, including prisoner learners, if not able to keep pace with digital technologies, are at risk of being increasingly marginalised educationally by the lack of access to computers and the internet. While acknowledging the difficulties this may pose within the prison system, international models in use in other jurisdictions could be considered in order to establish best practice in this regard.

A full copy of the Prison Adult Literacy Survey can be found on the link below: http://www.epea.org/uploads/media/Adult_Literacy_Survey.pdf

PRISON REFORM DEVELOPMENTS

"To support penal reform" is one of the aims of the IPEA. In line with this, the January meeting of the Executive Committee decided to reactivate the IPEA’s membership of the Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) (www.iprt.ie). Some developments of interest:

- The Director of the IPRT, Liam Herrick, left in February to take up the position of Special Adviser to the President, Michael D. Higgins. President Higgins himself has had a long interest in penal reform, has visited prisons (and especially Education Units!) during his presidency, and is the Patron of the IPRT.
- The new Director of IPRT will be Deirdre Malone, who has previously worked with the human rights group Liberty in Britain.
- The IPRT have completed an impressive report, Travellers in the Irish Prison System, based on research by Liza Costello, and it will be launched shortly.
- Before this summer, the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice (www.jcfj.ie) will publish a book through Liffey Press based on plenary addresses and papers from their very successful conference called Reimagining Imprisonment in Europe held in Trinity College, Dublin, in September 2012. The book promises insightful analysis from many European voices on the state of prisons and their future. Two Irish chapters in the book deal with prison education. Watch this space!

Articles and Photos

The committee would like people to submit articles of interest (150-250 words, with pictures preferably) to ipea.newsletter@gmail.com.
PIAAC, the OECD’s Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies is the most comprehensive international survey of adult skills ever undertaken. It aims to assess literacy in the information age. As such, as well as measuring literacy and numeracy skills, respondents were also assessed on their ability to solve problems in a technology rich environment and this referred to their ability to use common computer applications (e.g. email, internet browser, word processing) to complete various tasks. Ireland, along with 24 other countries, took part with almost 6,000 adults aged between 16 and 65 surveyed.

In October 2013, the Central Statistics Office, who conducted the research in Ireland, published the first round results. They reported that:

- In terms of literacy, Ireland ranks 17th out of the 24th participating countries.
- 18% of adults in Ireland were assessed at being at Level 1 or below on the literacy scale.
- There is no statistical difference between the average literacy score of adults in the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) conducted in Ireland in 1995 and the recent PIAAC.
- In Ireland, adults between the ages 25-34 have the highest literacy score while adults aged 55-65 years have the lowest score.
- More than two fifths (42%) of adults in Ireland score at or below level 1 on the problem solving scale.
- 10% of Irish adults said they had no computer experience, 5% failed the assessment and 17% opted not to take a computer-based assessment.
- In literacy and numeracy, the younger adult population (16-24 year-olds) scores significantly below the average of the OECD countries participating in the survey.

The CSO report also noted that there have been considerable changes to the adult population in Ireland. The number of adults aged 16-65 has, for example, increased by almost 700,000 between 1996 and 2012. At the same time the percentage of non-Irish residents in the population has more than doubled and a higher percentage of these do not speak English as a native language (15% versus 50% now). Finally, while almost a quarter of the population aged 16-65 reported that their highest level of education was at primary level in 1996, this had dropped to 10% in 2011 (Census 1996 and 2011).

The full PIAAC report is available on the CSO website:

More information on PIAAC is also available on the OECD website:
www.oecd.org/site/piaac
Partners in Crime Prevention

Prison Teachers of the Arts invited to attend mobility meeting in Brian Stack House, Portlaoise for the above Learning Partnership. The meetings are scheduled to take place between the 8th to the 10th of May. There will be discussion groups, keynote speakers and more.

Recent developments have shown that the arts can play an effective role in stimulating employability skills in prisons. Of course it can be a first step to other forms of learning, but there are also new possibilities. Art education was usually about the results (the painting, the performance of a theatre piece, the music, etc.) However, art education also has a hidden capital: the process. During the process of making a theatre piece, making music or working with a group of people on a wall painting many essential skills can be learned.

Within prison populations there are disadvantaged learners who miss fundamental skills like: Reflective thinking, Ability to listen to others, Effective communication, Willingness to participate, Time management, Positive attitude, Initiate ideas and respond to the ideas of others.

All these skills usually referred to as “Soft Skills”, “Employability Skills” or “Life Skills”, can be trained when we use the arts in workshops with people in prisons.

Please contact Veronica Hoen at vmhoen@ipsedu.ie for further information.

Check out the OECD Survey of Adult Skills, information will be available at http://www.oecd.org/site/piaac/
You wait forever for some good research on prison education, and then three come along at once...

“What’s the point of prison education” is a question that often hovers over the work of prison teachers. Well, that question has now been well and truly answered in, not one, but three high-quality research projects completed in Ireland in 2013.

Jane Carrigan’s PhD with St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, involved in-depth ‘life history’ interviews with men engaged in study in Mountjoy, St. Patrick’s Institution and Limerick Prison. She gained insight into their learning experiences “within the total institution”, but also a sense of the severe ‘mortifications’ being in prison involved for them. She makes recommendations for penal and educational policy and practice.

The PhD by Geraldine Cleere of Waterford Institute of Technology is entitled Prison Education, Social Capital and Desistance: An Exploration of Prisoners’ Experiences in Ireland. To explore the relationship between prison education and ‘desistance’ (which essentially means giving up crime), Geraldine interviewed, not just those in education, but also non-participants. She spoke to men in Mountjoy, Shelton Abbey and Pathways. She found “strong connections between prison education and the formation of pro-social bonds which... play a role in the desistance process”.

The third piece of research was by Jim Wallington, who retired in 2013 after many years teaching in Dublin prisons. His final year was in the Pathways Project, which gives educational and other post-release support, and there he interviewed many of those who “passed through”. He recorded their experiences and, as he says himself, tried to “make sense” of it all. His study is called Prison Education, Pathways Project and Desistance Theory.

Each of these studies is full of the voices of men who are, or have been, in prison. And each affirms the potential of prison education to help its students develop in deep and profound ways – ways that cannot be adequately measured through formal qualifications.

The IPEA will revive the Liam Minihan lecture this year, holding the 12th such lecture in Dublin in May. It will be jointly given by Jane and Geraldine, who will each speak about their research. CDETB plan to launch Jim’s study in the coming months.

Kevin Warner

Don’t forget to check the National Agency Leargas (www.leargas.ie) and EPEA (www.epea.org) websites for news on Learning Partnerships /exchanges /conferences/workshops and funding opportunities. Erasmus + is the new umbrella funding which now covers Grundtvig, Leonardo, etc. Please see link below http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/documents/erasmus-plus-programme-guide_en.pdf
THE SCHOOL CHOIR

The school choir has been going for many years now here in Cork Prison Education Unit. It was run in conjunction with Mary Jo (former Chaplain). We originally performed at various masses within the prison but in recent years have branched out to performing at various events within the school, such as Open School Exhibition, Red Cross Presentation Day, Careers Day etc. The members are ever changing. Some weeks we might have a big number of performers and other years maybe just a few. We tend to choose music that the prisoners can relate to and have meaning for them. The choir is good fun and is great for helping people overcome low self-esteem and helps them build confidence in themselves. It is a good way for prisoners to express themselves and after performing they always report feeling natural elation and pride.

Careers Day
This year, four students performed at the Careers Day in the Rec Hall. They sang two numbers at the opening ceremony, "Counting Stars" from One Republic and "Wake Me Up" by Avicii.

Anne Costelloe Interview on New Prison Education Journal

In the previous newsletter we mentioned a new prison education journal. Here we publish an interview between Veronica Hoen and Anne Costelloe (Section Editor) of the Journal of Prison Education and Re-entry about the new journal.

VH: What exactly is the Journal of Prison Education and Re-entry?
AC: It's an online international journal. It's for and about prison education and post-release initiatives.

VH: Is there a need for this kind of journal?
AC: At the moment, there is only one other journal that deals with prison education, namely, the CEA's Journal of Correctional Education. However, you have to pay to read that and in my opinion most of its articles are concerned with American issues and programmes, and as such, are not of so much interest to Irish readers.

VH: So how is this new journal different?
AC: Well it's free for one thing. Because it's open access, you don't have to pay to read it or authors don't have to pay to have their work published in it. Also,

The website is https://boap.uib.no/index.php/jper/index
We also have a Facebook page (with some lovely Irish prison art on it!)
https://www.facebook.com/JournalofPrisonEducationandReentry
we can publish an article as soon as it has gone through the review process, therefore you don’t have to wait for each volume to read something new as it is being added to and updated constantly.

But perhaps more importantly, it is unique in that it is the only journal out there that provides a forum for prison teachers. The journal is divided into 2 sections - a research section and a practitioner section. The research section is a traditional 'academic-type' journal that publishes formal, peer-reviewed empirical studies and theoretical papers. The practitioner section on the other hand is less formal and should be seen as a forum within which practitioners and others can share writings that are not so easily categorised or which wouldn’t readily find a home in traditional research journals.

VH: Tell me more about the practitioner section; what kind of things can we expect to read in it?
AC: Anything and everything! The focus of submissions should be on ‘what’s happening on the ground’: the teaching and learning taking place in prison classrooms, libraries, cells and landings, training workshops, post-release centres and so on. Critical analysis and insights regarding effective practices, teaching and learning strategies, syntheses of small-scale research, examinations of evaluation studies or audits, analysis of trends in prison education, prisoner insights and contributions, critical essays on research findings, literature reviews, are just some of the areas we hope to explore. Other focus areas could include:
- Curriculum development
- Practitioner induction courses and professional development
- Materials and resources development
- Assessment practices and innovations
- Policy formation
- Advocacy for prisoner education
- Commentaries on philosophical or political developments
- Historical studies

As you can see, the difference is not so much what the article is about but instead ‘who wrote it and why’. The practitioner section is not for researchers and academics writing for other researchers and academics but instead it’s for prison teachers; other prison practitioners, student teachers, prison learners, etc. to share their experiences, insights and practices. So, if an IPEA member is thinking about writing something for the journal but are not sure if it’s the kind of thing we’d publish, well I guess they should just ask themselves, is it something that they’d like to read about themselves? If the answer is yes, well then write it up and submit it online.

VH: So will everything that is submitted be published?
AC: No. Submissions to the 'research section' follow the same process as any academic journal, i.e., they are subjected to blind review and accepted or rejected accordingly. Submissions to the 'practitioner section' are treated rather differently. There is no blind review, however, the section editors will decide if the submission will be published as it is, or if perhaps it needs some revision before being accepted. Submissions may be rejected if they are considered not to be relevant to the readership or if they don't highlight 'anything new' or if they fail to meet the submission criteria as outlined on the website.

VH: Who decides which section an article goes into?
AC: Initially, we expect the author to choose which section they feel is the best fit for their piece; however, the editors will have the final say in determining the most appropriate section. So that means, when you submit a piece, you choose which section you'd like to see it published in. If the editors feel it should be published in the other section, they will inform the author before proceeding.

VH: Can you only submit online? Could someone just send you a copy instead?
AC: In the interests of fairness, it is best to submit online. The process is fairly straightforward and clearly outlined on the website. If anyone experiences any problems submitting online, Ginger Walker, the journal manager will sort it out; you can email her at gmwalker@vcu.edu. But, I'm always happy to talk to anyone who may be thinking about sending in something.

VH: Are there any particular submission criteria?
AC: The criteria are more or less the same as for any journal, however, we understand that submissions to the practitioner section may not conform to standard research reporting structures and formats, and of course we make allowances for this. Full details and guidance on the submission criteria are outlined clearly on the website. VH: Who is behind the journal and how did you come to be involved?
AC: The primary impetus for a new journal came from EPEA members in the University of Bergen in Norway, the University of San Bernardino and the Virginia Commonwealth University in the US. They felt that any such journal should somehow try and bridge the gap between research and practice and that's how the idea of both a practitioner and a researcher section evolved. They approached me to become the editor of the practitioner section and I in turn invited Dr Cormac Behan at the University of Sheffield (the former Chairperson of the IPEA) to come on board also.

VH: Is there anything in particular you'd like to tell IPEA members about the journal?
AC: Don't be put off if you visit the website at the moment - it says it's 'under construction' but if click on 'the about' tab you'll find that there is a lot of information there.

We are accepting submissions and you'll find the 'call for papers' on the website and this explains what you need to do to submit. We have some interesting articles lined up and we plan to publish our first volume in May. But I'd personally like to see an 'Irish piece' in the first issue - so it would be great if an IPEA member wrote something. For example, you, yourself Veronica, could write about your role as Art Development Worker and outline for an international audience what that entails and why it is important. I think that's the kind of thing that prison art teachers, managers and policy makers would find interesting and it's an excellent example of good practice for any prison education service.

VH: Finally, where can IPEA members find out more?
AC: The website is https://boap.uib.no/index.php/jper/index. Or just google 'JPER journal prison education'. We also have a Facebook page (with some lovely Irish prison art on it!) https://www.facebook.com/JournalofPrisonEducationandReentry/
Name: 
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The main benefit of membership of the IPEA is the opportunity to work together to develop prison education in Ireland and through-out Europe.
You can become a member of the IPEA by completing an application form and paying a subscription of €25. By joining IPEA, you receive membership and also get the benefits of the EPEA.

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