

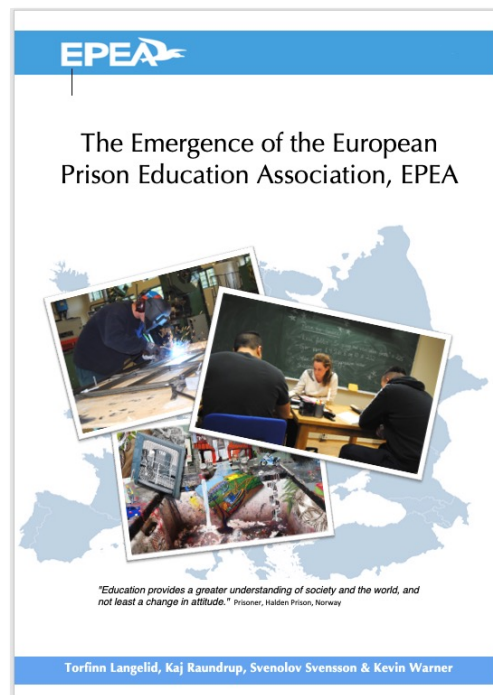
## Plenary talk to EPEA Conference, Tønsberg, Norway, 16 June 2023: Dr Kevin Warner The Emergence of the EPEA: a supportive organisation and its foundation values

The Emergence of the EPEA: a supportive organisation and its foundation values

-Kevin Warner, EPEA Conference, Tønsberg, June 2023



Greetings to all of you in Tønsberg from County Wicklow in Ireland. On my own behalf and on behalf of my fellow authors (Torfinn Langelid from Norway, Kaj Raundrup from Denmark and Svenolov Svensson from Sweden), I want to say that we appreciate the opportunity to speak to this conference about the book we've produced, *The Emergence of the EPEA*.<sup>1</sup> We are especially thankful to the Norwegian hosts for making a hardcopy of the book available to every one of you participating in Tønsberg.



<sup>1</sup> The book is available at <http://pepre.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/The-Emergence-of-the-EPEA-Langelid-et-al-2021.pdf>, as well on other websites.

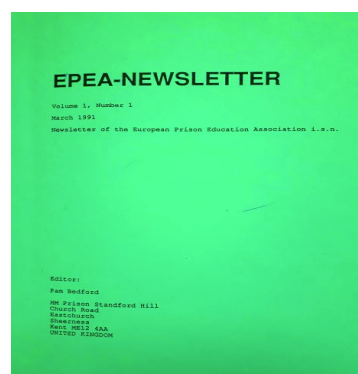
In this talk, I hope I can stimulate you to take a close look at the book and, hopefully, gain an appreciation of how the EPEA emerged over time and especially the philosophy that lay behind its founding.

I hope that there is much that you will find interesting in the book, matters such as the early developments in international cooperation in the 1970s and 1980s that took place through separate initiatives in the Nordic countries, England, Cyprus and Germany; or the important contributions of people from North America (such as Stephen Duguid, Carolyn Eggleston, Thom Gehring, David Jenkins and many others); or, how, after the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, the EPEA was a small part of a great swirl of new interaction between ‘East’ and ‘West’; or the great help given in this century by the European Union and Alan Smith in particular.

In researching for the book, each of the authors was struck by certain episodes. I was especially taken by the Finnish woman, Sinikka Metsätähti, who had worked as a prison teacher in Helsinki but with little support from prison authorities. But when she obtained a new job with the Nordic Folk Academy in Kungälv, she used this position to promote the first Nordic gathering on education in prison, which took place in that Swedish city in 1977.

I was also moved by the story of Herbert Hilkenbach, who founded the German organisation for prison teachers. Herbert began to teach in a youth prison in 1957, giving six hours of lessons each Saturday to up to 40 young prisoners. The classroom was a large communal cell where prisoners slept: every Saturday it was cleared out and prisoners came in for their lessons, each with a three-legged stool carried from his own cell. The young men used these stools to write on while kneeling before them, using pencils rather than pens – the authorities would not allow pens for fear that they would be used to make tattoos.

There are many more stories of this kind in the book, from those early years and from EPEA conferences in later decades, which I hope will interest you. However, in this talk, I am going to focus on just two aspects of the EPEA’s story which go to the heart of the values and thinking that underpin its development. Firstly, I want to talk about the kind of organisation those involved in the early decades envisaged. Secondly, I will explore the special concept of education in prison that the EPEA was set up to promote – education in prison is not just one thing. Each of the two key ideas I’ll explore has been seriously challenged in recent times.



If one person can be said to have set events in motion that would lead to the establishment of the EPEA, it was an English prison teacher, Pam Bedford (who is known as Pam Radcliffe today). In the very first Newsletter of the EPEA, in 1991, Pam set out its purpose as being “to support and assist the professional development of persons involved in prison education through European co-operation”. And, from the beginning, the primary focus was on educators ‘working on the ground’; this term meant those ‘in daily contact with prisoners’. Pam explained that prison educators have “much in common in their specialist, and often isolated, field” and welcome “the opportunity to share experience and develop ideas together”.

‘Reaching out and making connections...’ is part of the title of two chapters in the book, and the constitution, structures and tools for communication that were built up in the early years were to facilitate that core purpose of educators in prison making meaningful contact with each other. The vision was of a membership-focused, participative, accountable, Europe-wide body.

### EPEA: MEMBERSHIP-FOCUSED, MEMBERSHIP-DRIVEN

- Involving as many members as possible from many educational roles in different places of custody
- Europe-wide: involving all European countries, and beyond Europe
- Democratic and participative: members would elect the Steering Committee and would shape the EPEA and its direction
- Accountable: members would have full information, including financial
- Good governance: it would follow recognised good governance practice for organisations, including time limits on the SC

What the EPEA was to be can be summarised in principles:

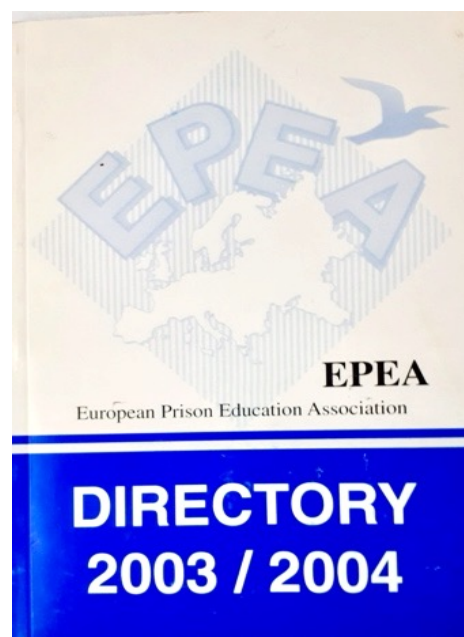
1. Membership-focused and membership driven, involving as many members as possible.
2. Europe-wide, involving all European countries.
3. Democratic and participative: members would elect the Steering Committee and would shape the EPEA and its direction.
4. Accountable: members would have full information, including financial
5. It would follow recognised good governance practice, such as time limits on the Steering Committee.

That last point was strongly pushed by Robert Suvaal from The Netherlands who was a key EPEA founder. He used to complain strongly about other European

organisations that had become dominated by cliques and whose leadership hardly ever changed.

The belief in the early decades was that these principles were important if the EPEA was to carry out its mission of enabling educators in prisons share experience and develop ideas together. In the book we are critical of what we see as a falling away from such principles in recent years; at the end of Chapter 6 we refer to what we call 'a lowering of horizons'; and at the end of chapter 11 we are very critical of the thinking in 'Vision 2025'. Some may want to dismiss these concerns as those of grumpy old men – and we are old and can be a bit grumpy - but we still think these issues require serious consideration.

For example, it is surely of concern that only the seven countries that have branches can now be fully part of the EPEA – and for some of those, such as Germany, the links seem very weak. It is of concern also that there seems to be little awareness of how many members there are in the EPEA and who they are. It is a concern that, for a period recently, not one of those who were acting as officers had been elected by members. And it is a concern that it is many years since there was full financial accountability to the members at a General Council meeting or indeed anywhere else.



But, to be more positive, I want to give two examples from the past of what a membership-focused and membership-driven organisation looks like.

Between 2000 and 2005, five Directories were produced by the Membership Secretary. Each listed the name, role and contact details of every member in order to facilitate contact and interaction between them; every member got a printed copy of each of those books.

Or look at *the participative process* by which a strategic plan called ‘Vision 2006’, and regular ‘Action Plans’ and reviews conducted around this strategy, were developed in the years between 1997 and 2006. The wider membership was extensively involved in these processes, especially through special meetings of Liaison Persons; in earlier years, two Liaison Persons represented *every* country with EPEA membership. A similar inclusive process happened in the lead-up to the revision of the Constitution under Anne Costelloe in 2007, with members helping to shape proposals for change. By contrast, ‘Vision 2025’, which features prominently on the EPEA website these days, lacks such a democratic mandate, as well as having other shortcomings which we describe in the final chapter.

The second aspect of the book which I’d like to focus on is the question of what we mean by ‘education in prison’. Here the challenge is very much external to the EPEA: in many countries the purpose and role of education in prison has been reduced and redirected as penal policy has shifted and a much more punitive culture has become embedded in many places. We refer to this challenge frequently throughout the book.

### EDUCATION: A RIGHT? OR TO ADDRESS REOFFENDING?

- **Norway:** Education passes on values and imparts knowledge and tools that allow everyone **to make full use of their abilities and realise their talents...**  
... the **humane treatment** of prison inmates and the protection of their **civil rights**. This has been crucial for successfully **returning inmates to society...**  
**The object for education in the correctional services is the same for all other education.** It is meant to help to cultivate, assist in coping with society and becoming self-reliant and impart knowledge, **enabling the individual to make the most of his talents and contribute to wealth creation in Norwegian society.**
- **England: Stopping criminals re-offending** is an important aim of any criminal justice system. **We will always seek to punish offenders.** Those who commit the most serious crimes, and pose the greatest risk to the public, must expect their punishment to be severe. But we cannot properly protect the public by focusing on punishment alone; we must also address the underlying causes of crime. We can best protect society by making a positive and lasting difference to individual offenders. To that end, **the Government aims to help offenders become more productive members of society.**

Perhaps I can best illustrate two very different approaches by prison authorities to education in prison, by contrasting policy statements from Norway and England in 2005.<sup>2</sup> The official Norwegian approach reflects the Council of Europe thinking on education in prison which the EPEA was founded to promote: education is a right

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<sup>2</sup> Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (2005) *Education and Training in the Correctional Services: ‘Another Spring’*. Oslo: Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. Online. [www.epea.org/uploads/media/AnotherSpring\\_Norway\\_.pdf](http://www.epea.org/uploads/media/AnotherSpring_Norway_.pdf).

Department for Education and Skills (2005) *Reducing Re-offending Through Skills and Employment*. Norwich: The Stationery Office. Online. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/272207/6702.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/272207/6702.pdf).



which all in prison have, its purpose is the development of the person in the same way as it would be outside. The official English perspective is very limited: in a punitive and restrictive system, education is seen mainly as a tool to reduce offending.

By the way, in making this contrast between different official outlooks, I am not saying everything is perfect in Norway and poor in England. I am merely illustrating very different thinking among those who run prison systems. In fact, a recent article on music in Norwegian prisons notes how for some, notably women and foreign prisoners, access to this cultural activity is in practice often 'a reward rather than a right'<sup>3</sup>. Likewise, In England these days, there is some extraordinarily good educational work going on, such as that promoted by the Prison Educational Trust, initiatives with universities, and much else. But these admirable, and in some ways heroic, efforts are small in relation to an overlarge, punitive, restrictive and overcrowded system.

My purpose here is, not to rank countries, but to draw attention to the importance of overall penal policy and to show that there are at least two very contrasting approaches which greatly affect the scope of education. Often, this different thinking can be seen in contrasting understandings of the word 'rehabilitation', which Cormac Behan has written about so well. He explains how at times so-called 'rehabilitation' can be little short of brain-washing, but at other times a liberating person-centred process similar to adult education.<sup>4</sup>

A shift in penal policy thinking in the Netherlands, based on 'What Works' thinking, is described by Kathinka Reijnders in our chapter on Directors' conferences. As a consequence, the education available in Dutch prisons was greatly reduced. There is now only a very limited curriculum, with the arts and library services totally removed. Of course, many countries lie between these two poles. In Ireland, for example, education is seen by those who run the prison system as a 'rehabilitation service', while most teachers would see their role as that of adult educators seeking to develop 'the whole person'.

These backward developments in penal policy thinking and practice are fairly widespread in Europe now, but of course not everywhere. We refer in the book to this more punitive and restrictive approach as 'penal climate change' and it does represent an enormous challenge for those trying to provide genuine adult education for all.

However, if you read the early chapters of the book, you will see that the *prison* leadership in Europe, in the 1980s and 1990s especially, held views that are very

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<sup>3</sup> Áine Mangaoang (2021). "A reward rather than a right": Facilitators' perspectives on the place of music in Norwegian prison exceptionalism. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/10298649211014235>

<sup>4</sup> Behan, C. (2014). Learning to Escape: Prison Education and the Potential for Transformation. *Journal of Prison Education and Re-entry*, 1 (1), 20-31. Available at: <https://jper.uib.no/index.php/jper/article/view/594/615>

supportive of authentic education for people in prison. For example, here are some of the statements you will find from Director Generals and such people in earlier times.

### HUMANE PENAL POLICY: 'A NEW CONCEPT FOR EDUCATION' (I)

- (H. H. Brydenscholt, Denmark). 'As it is a moral obligation of a welfare state to try to **remedy the disadvantages of the weaker members of society** there was ... [a] duty to seek to improve the educational status of prisoners. That a person had committed a crime for which he was serving a sentence should make no difference to this obligation... there should be **educational opportunities** matched as closely as possible to those to be found in outside society.' (p.27)
- (Hans Tulkens, Netherlands). 'If you go on using imprisonment, you have at least to try to **make it as harmless and as positive as possible** for the prisoners. Therefore, **listen to them, take account of their opinions**... offer prisoners consequently realistic and attainable opportunities, chances, activities, methods and help which **meet their needs and stimulate their interests**.' (pp.32-33)
- (Ferenc Tari, Hungary). [There is an] obligation on authorities to **make prison systems humane... treating citizens in prison with respect for their human rights and autonomy**, and in ensuring acceptable practical conditions on the ground. The implication of this approach for education in prison... is that it should be **voluntary, independent of political ideology, offer real choices and respect those in prison** as 'competent, adult and responsible'. (p.106)

The three quotations here come from Director Generals in three different decades, from the 1970s to the 1990s. The page numbers refer to where we discuss these ideas in the book. For these prison system leaders, prison is inherently damaging to people and so should be used as a last resort; and they saw education as having the capacity to limit that damage. They recognised people in prison as citizens with rights, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds. They therefore felt an obligation to help those in prison grow and develop through education, in so far as this can be done in prisons. These leaders treated men and women in prison as subjects not objects; they felt those in custody should be respected and offered real choices and opportunities.

*(continues)*

## HUMANE PENAL POLICY: 'A NEW CONCEPT FOR EDUCATION' (2)

- (Ken Neale, *England and Wales*, pp.24-26). 'rehabilitation... had a long run... the emphasis had turned to priming regimes for more **effective preparation for release** so that prisoners were better equipped to **find acceptance and a stable role** in society'
- 'That was an important signal for education in finding a valid role in... systems now adjusting to... the deployment of prison resources to **minimising negative factors of imprisonment** and to optimise those elements that **contribute to resocialisation**'
- [education's] 'relevance to life and **personal development**'. [Education enriches] 'the **personal experience and capacity** of people in custody'
- 'the role of prison education in **sustaining people during custody** and **preparing prisoners for their release** into the insecurity of life in the community'
- 'Prisons are of their nature coercive; **education is, or should be, inherently liberating.**'

Given the punitive policies and the narrower official role for education within prisons in England these days, it may surprise many that the pre-eminent *European* prison leader among that generation was Kenneth Neale from the Home Office in London. This next slide gives a sense of his thinking and values. Neale saw education as deeply developmental; it had the capacity to sustain people in a coercive environment and prepare them to deal with the difficulties of life outside. It was Kenneth Neale, in his capacity as Chair of the Council of Europe's Committee on Crime Problems, who set up and gave broad and holistic terms of reference to the Committee which produced *Education in Prison*. He also initiated what we now regard, in retrospect, as the first and second EPEA conferences. And Kenneth Neale also had a major role in shaping the European Prison Rules.

Penal climate change, the punitive approach that has developed in many places, means that prisons are now often hostile environments for authentic education; and educators, if they can get in the door at all, often face enormous challenges. However, if you read the first few chapters of our book, you will see that an earlier prison leadership in Europe held views on penal policy that were very supportive of education in its best sense; and they asserted that all people in prison had a *right* to education.





A core idea of the EPEA is to promote the kind of education set out in the Council of Europe report, *Education in Prison* and, indeed, in the *European Prison Rules*. These documents emphasise the right all people in prison have to education. They also advocate an adult education approach, a wide curriculum and holistic aims. In researching this book, I became more sharply aware than previously how that wide and deep concept of education was given to us by the directors of prison administrations, whose thinking on penal policy and therefore on education within prison was radically more progressive than many later people in similar roles.

That view of holistic education as a right needs to be fought for much more these days, and it is crucial that the EPEA is assertive in upholding that progressive approach. We can draw on the thinking of those earlier leaders of European prison systems, on the *European Prison Rules* and on *Education in Prison*. Those progressive perspectives, which are in sharp contrast to much recent punitive and restrictive thinking, are also excellently set out by the UN Special Rapporteur, Vernor Muñoz.<sup>5</sup> But especially, a brilliant recent report by James King of Scotland for the EuroPris organisation asserts the same thinking, centred on the right to education, and does it perhaps more articulately than earlier Council of Europe reports.<sup>6</sup> We write in some detail about James King's report at the end of Chapter 4 of our book.

We hope that our book, drawing as it does on earlier reports and progressive thinking, will give encouragement to educators in prison settings of many different kinds in many countries. That is why we wrote it.

See Kevin's contribution to the conference on youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x40E1tqtT3w>

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<sup>5</sup> Munoz, V. (2009). The right to education of persons in detention, report of the special rapporteur on the right to education. United Nations: Human Rights Council. Available at: [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/11session/A.HRC.11.8\\_en.pdf](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/11session/A.HRC.11.8_en.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.europris.org/file/report-review-of-european-prison-education-policy-and-council-of-europe-recommendation-89-12-on-education-in-prison/>