



A Resource for Higher Education Educators

Developed by Dr Gertrude Cotter, School of Education, UCC. September 2024.

TRANSCRIPTION

Programme 3: 1970s and 1990s onwards

Guests: Robin Hannon, Mariam Olusoji and Stephen McCloskey

Gertrude Cotter (GC):



You are listening to Community Radio Youghal 104 FM. My name is Gertrude Cotter, and you are listening to the Global Hub, the program that deals with social justice issues at home and abroad. You are very welcome to the program. This program is the first in a series of eight programs which documents the history of development and global citizenship education in Ireland. The Global Hub is funded by Trócaire, the International Development Agency. But it must be said that

Trócaire has not influenced the editorial position of any of these programs. Trócaire has a long-standing development education program, and they have funded the Global Hub since 2015.

Through funding different groups like Community Radio Youghal, they help us all to educate ourselves about complex global social, economic, political, and environmental issues. There is a very strong activist and academic tradition in Ireland whereby people in all walks of life, sometimes in a paid capacity, sometimes not, bring attention to and take action on global justice issues. This series of programs aims to tell the story of this tradition in Ireland through the voices of some of those who have formed and continue to work in this area. Some might have been involved in an activist capacity, some as teachers in primary, secondary, or preschool, some as academics, lecturers, and researchers at third level. Some might work in the statutory sector, for instance, in Irish Aid, the statutory agency that funds much of the work in the sector in Ireland. Some work in the youth, community, and voluntary sector.

Development education is referred to by many names, so it can be very confusing. For instance, in this series, you will hear the terms development education, global learning, global education, or global citizenship education, and other terminology as well. But no matter what terminology people use here, they all have a similar agenda: educating for a just and sustainable world. Keeping this as our central focus, we can now hear about the development of the ideas around development education or global citizenship education in Ireland through the voices of those who have contributed and continue to contribute to its development.

This series of eight programs paints a picture of a particular slice of Irish life with personal and professional stories that need to be told. It is particularly important to capture the earlier history of development education in Ireland, since we did not have the kind of communication we have today. Back then, we didn't have the internet, we didn't have recordings from Zoom and Teams and Skype, and so on. Indeed, it must be said that we did have radio, and I am happy to recognize the enduring power of radio to tell powerful stories, and particularly the power of community radio to include and reach out to hear our voices in a democratic way.

My thanks to Community Radio Youghal for facilitating this series of shows, and I acknowledge the work of Tom O'Keefe and Paul Daly in patiently editing these programs. We will look at the development of development education in Ireland through the decades, starting in the 1950s and coming up to the present day.



So, you're listening to Community Radio Youghal 104 FM, this is Gertrude Cotter, and with me now I have Robin Hannon. Robin is now retired. He has been active in human rights and social justice movements all his adult life, and in the 1980s he worked briefly in the Sandinista Ministry of Education in Nicaragua at a time when it was under attack by the Reagan administration. A few years later, he had a chance to move from voluntary to full-time activism when he left the civil service

to become coordinator of an organization called Comhlámh, a development education and advocacy organization based in Dublin and in Cork at the time. He subsequently worked as CEO of the Irish Refugee Council and director of the European Anti-Poverty Network in Ireland. So, Robin, first of all, you're very welcome, and thank you for being with us again.

Robin Hannon (RH):

Thank you.

GC:

Let's start at the as early as you want. What were some of your earlier influences for yourself in terms of your interest in politics or human rights or development, those kinds of issues? What were some of your early influences, just as yourself?

RH:

When I was very young, I was surrounded, as all boys were in those days, by lots of what you might call military stuff. There were war comics, people playing war games, books about war, all that type of thing. And I felt it was wrong. It just seemed wrong that this was all treating war as a game. And when I was very young, in the library, in Bray County Wicklow, in the children's section, I came across a book about Mahatma Gandhi. This was long before Gandhi would have been part of the curriculum, which he probably is now in schools. And I was fascinated by the idea of someone who could organize a very effective and broad campaign without using violence, which was, I would like to think, is a little bit more understood now, but at that time, was almost heretical. That was one of my first influences. I became aware quite young also about social differences, about rich and poor, about things which I felt were wrong in the world. So long before I'd heard of terms like development or development education, I was very interested in these sorts of topics.

GC:

I'm very interested in early childhood experiences. And if you don't mind me asking, what do you think, you know, the way you said this sort of affected you, the military stuff—there are a lot of young boys in the world who wouldn't have been impacted in the way you were or didn't start thinking about it. Were there other influences in your life? Do you think it was just your own personal sensibility, or were there other family influences or something like that?

RH:

I find that very hard to say, but what I would say is, the other influence on me in my childhood was my mother was a collector for Oxfam at a time when there were no strong Irish-based NGOs in the 1960s. And with the collector's role, if you like, came news sheets, which talked about development issues, which eventually led to the foundation of the New Internationalist magazine, which I was reading from the time it came out in the early 70s. So I was, I suppose, exposed to ideas of what we would now call development in a very crude and broad sense.

GC:

That's very interesting, historically as well. I didn't know that these news sheets turned into the New Internationalist. I mean, from a historical point of view, that's an interesting fact as well.

RH:

Yes, and I think it's interesting, as I say, many of the things that were included in those news sheets would make anyone involved in development work cringe nowadays, but they did at least get us thinking, and they were a very important influence. In fact, as soon as an Irish NGO was set up, as soon as Concern was set up, my mother switched to Concern because she felt she should work for an Irish NGO, not collect for an Irish NGO, not an English-based one, as it was at the time. But that didn't, unfortunately, at the time, come with as much information as it would now. I was lucky in that I was exposed in the 1960s to the type of information which people, I think, can get a bit more commonly now from NGOs and development organizations. It's much more broadly available nowadays. When I was at school, The Ecologist magazine produced a supplement, which became a book called The Blueprint for Survival, which I think is very, very relevant now, just essentially talking about the limits to growth, the fact that we can't continue to grow endlessly, and therefore we need to make social choices about how we allocate the resources that we have. So while I was interested in more mainstream political views that were going around at the time, for me, what would now be called green thinking, or would now be called, as I say, limits to growth, was something that I came across early enough in life, and it gave me a chance to think about it. And I suppose that's been a very deep influence on me ever since.

GC:

It still comes back to that basic point, doesn't it? All the time—the redistribution of wealth. It really comes back to that core point.

RH:

If resources of the world were limitless, it's just possible that trickle-down effects might just be made to work, though they haven't been very successful to date. Given that we have limited resources, as people were beginning to talk about in the 1970s, but it's only really becoming mainstream now in terms of political thinking, we have much bigger social development choices to face.

GC:

Could you tell me a little bit about maybe the sector that is development education, as you knew it, as you understood it, just your own personal experience of it?

RH:

I was involved in a lot of what we would call solidarity work in the 1980s. I was active in the anti-apartheid movement, the Chile Solidarity campaign. Later on, I was very active in the Irish Nicaragua Support Group in the late 80s, and a little bit into the 90s. I started working in Comhlámh in the 1990s.

GC:

Hold on, what is Comhlámh?

RH:

Comhlámh was set up as a membership organization of returned development workers to bring home to Ireland an understanding of the development issues which people had encountered overseas and to support each other. By the time I became involved in the 1990s, it was evolving into a more general development education organization. In fact, I think it would be fair to say that Comhlámh was one of the first organizations to initiate development education in Ireland. There was a project called Bringing It All Back Home, which involved two facilitators, Jane Clarke and Jim Daminie, organizing a series of seminars to bring over people who were involved in development education work in other countries, and to bring together educators, development workers, people from non-governmental organizations, and so on, into a series of seminars to think about how you could bring development education to Ireland.

By the time I became involved in Comhlámh in the mid-1990s, development education was a very large part of its work. There was a training program for people, like courses, people who wanted to become involved in development education. And there were training courses in development education skills. We also had a course on development and the environment, and we produced courses and resources on human rights and development.

GC:

And in terms of what development education was at that time in the 1990s, what was it? Who were you talking to, and what were you trying to do?

RH:

Essentially, as a membership-based organization, we supported people who wanted to take up global justice and rights issues from almost any perspective. There was a strong group who wanted to take on trade issues. The issues that strike me particularly strongly were perceived as trade issues. There were very strong campaigns, particularly from the Comhlámh Action Network, which was based in Cork, campaigning around a number of trade issues, usually involving European policy, because Ireland's influence on trade is very much through European policy, and we were trying to counteract some of the negative effects of European trade policy on developing countries. Issues like the dumping of Irish agricultural products, issues like the Multi-Fibre Agreement, which restricted imports of clothes and so on from developing countries—there were specific issues like that.

One of the most important issues at the time was the way in which the image of developing countries was being projected in Ireland, and that's still an issue. I think there's a very strong

incentive for development organizations, who need to raise money on the streets—luckily, we didn't have to do that—to present an image of people facing disaster, people facing starvation, people helpless, effectively, needing our help. The more progressive organizations—and I think more and more of the NGOs at that time, and even now, became aware of the importance of this—recognized that showing pictures of starving children is not the best way to promote understanding in Ireland of the reality of life in Africa. Africa is not a continent full of starving babies. There are enormous problems, the legacy of colonialism, the sort of structures that people have to face, which do lead to conflict and starvation. But this image of Africans as helpless, rather than as being the most important agents of their own development—which I think most people in NGOs would recognize they really are—is very damaging.

Comhlámh became involved in campaigns both about the images used in promoting fundraising for some of the less scrupulous organizations, and also in the way in which development was often portrayed as being support from people in Ireland for people who were themselves helpless. Most of the development work, of course, is undertaken by local people, and most of the lead is taken by local people. The role of outsiders is to support and empower that and to try to take away some of the barriers which richer countries have placed, preventing that from happening, rather than, as I say, simply seeing developing countries as being helpless and needing our endless charity.

Another issue that I had a particularly strong interest in myself was the issue of debt. We're talking about a period when the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was imposing structural adjustment programs, which were absolutely devastating and decimating societies all over the world. This was as much a political project as an economic one. And this is something I was already involved in through the Nicaragua support group, because Nicaragua itself was suffering from some of these new policies introduced by the IMF.

What our development education programs were trying to do was to take a much more global approach. We were looking both at development education as a method, a technique, a way of working, and development education as a set of issues linking global and national issues. For me, this is something I find personally important: we often talk about development education methodology as if it were specifically invented for development education. There are certain aspects, like the link between local and global, that are specific to development education. But many of the approaches to development education work, many of the approaches to exploring issues—starting from the personal by shared experiences, the use of games, the use of various facilitated sessions to try to explore our own thinking and understanding of issues—are actually common also to community work and to youth work, and so on. And I think that interaction has been very important.

GC:

Yeah, I think there was also a sense—which I would have felt very strongly before and during my time in Comhlámh—that Ireland had learned a lot from experience in developing countries. Development workers, missionaries, and others had been often radicalized by their experience abroad. A whole range of people coming back, particularly from Latin America, but also from countries like the Philippines and some African countries, were bringing ideas back to Ireland, which became the basis of community development work in Ireland. You'll find key people in the Irish Traveller movement, key people in unemployed organizations, key people in the women's movement, key people in a whole range of different organizations in Ireland who had learned what they learned from Latin American counterparts, from Filipino counterparts, and so on. So that sense of what the very first Comhlámh development education program called Bringing It All Back Home was, I think, a very important part of what Comhlámh was trying to do: to bring an understanding of

how progressive development work can learn in Ireland from examples overseas, from the experience of people organizing in Latin American countries, African countries, and so on, and also seeing what we ourselves can contribute to that debate. It was very much about linking issues in Ireland with issues worldwide.

RH:

Yes, I think there would have been a consciousness that, while obviously the development of Ireland was at a different stage and had quite different characteristics from many of the poorer countries where Irish volunteers were working, the essential issues—issues of discrimination, issues of human rights, issues of economic inequalities, and so on—were the same issues, though taking different forms, obviously looking different in a rich country from a poor country.

GC:

Do you think the colonial legacy is what development education is largely about?

RH:

Yes, I think it's important that development education is not just an instrument of campaigning. I mean, in many ways, I'm probably more of a campaigner than a development educator, but I think it's important that people can learn about issues, think about issues, explore and discuss issues with each other without feeling they all have to agree on the conclusions.

GC:

Absolutely. And when you think about it, Robin, you're talking here about a lot of people working on a voluntary basis. And you're talking here about huge issues, you know—dumping, agricultural policy, European policies, debt, the IMF, the World Bank. But isn't it extraordinary, when you think back to all the work that happened and is still happening, really, mostly on a voluntary basis?

RH:

I do find it extraordinary. There is always a tension between that sort of voluntary nature and the ability to obtain funding. Most of my early involvement in what you might call development issues and solidarity issues was in groups which had no outside funding. People simply, you know, if we needed to pay for a leaflet, we would try and raise a bit of money with a pub quiz. But everything else was voluntary. Most development education is now funded, and I was lucky in my time in Comhlámh that there was a funding body, a little bit separate from the government but channelling government money, run by people who themselves had a background in development education.

But I think there is a tension often between that volunteerism and what you're trying to achieve. On the one hand, there's a danger of a bit of naivety. There's a danger that people will jump on an issue, run off with it, and not really have studied it very deeply. I don't find that has been much of a problem in practice. A good example, I think, would be the East Timor campaigns run by Tom Hyland. Tom Hyland was a bus driver who saw a documentary about human rights abuse in East Timor, decided he wanted to do something about it, and started a campaign. Now, along the way, later on, he managed to get small amounts of money for educational projects, but effectively, he gathered a group of friends, got advice from organizations who already had done campaigning work like Afri—who you may be talking to later in your series—and launched a public awareness and lobbying campaign, which became very prominent in Irish public opinion and which also actually had quite a lot of influence across the world.

You're talking about a one person gathering a few friends, deciding to do something about an issue they felt strongly about, and things moved. Nowadays, of course, I would think of someone like Greta Thunberg, who managed to encapsulate the thinking of a generation, if you like, of young people in some countries—maybe not the whole generation, but an important part of a generation—and found a way to express something they wanted to express.

GC:

Okay, well, thank you for that. I'm in awe, really, of your memory, Robin, and your ability to articulate some very, very big issues. But it's interesting because you can even see the history of each one of those little details in there, in what you're saying, and right up to the present day. So, Robin, I'm going to have to, unfortunately, leave it. I actually think that you could do a whole series yourself. So, I'd like to thank you once again, as you have given me time here on Community Radio Youghal. Best of luck with any future work you're doing in the area. And thank you very much for your contribution to this program.

RH:

Thank you for the opportunity as well.

GC:

Thank you very much.

GC:



In the late 90s and early 2000s, I myself was working as a CEO of an organization called NASC, then called the Irish Immigrant Support Centre in Cork. At that time, we developed within the organization a specific development education project aimed primarily at migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees in Cork. It was ably facilitated by June Barry, whom we spoke to earlier in the series. Later on, we also employed a full-time development education staff worker to carry out and support the work in that organization. Our Chairperson for much of the time I was there was a woman called Mariam Olusoji, and she was also a participant in the development education project, which was the first of its kind in an organization working with migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in Ireland.

Mariam Olusoji has now been living in Ireland for about 20 years and is a qualified solicitor. I'm glad to say Mariam is with me now. So, first of all, Mariam, you're very welcome to the Global Hub radio program.

Mariam Olusoji (MO):

You're welcome, and it's great to talk to you again.

GC:

Of course, we're not talking here on behalf of the organization as such, because it's a long time ago, but we're reflecting, you and I, on some of the work we did in the field of development education in the 90s and early 2000s, where you were very, very active. So, it's great that your memory is hopefully better than mine on some of the things we did. Mariam, can you remember the development education project that we ran at that time in Cork?

MO:

Yes, Gertrude, I remember it very well. It was a great initiative with a great group of friends from the migrant and asylum-seeking community, and also students in migration studies at UCC. First of all, we did about 10 sessions on development education, where we explored what development education is. We talked about development issues in our countries and, in particular, the cost of migration. At each session, we took a different theme and explored it using participatory methodologies. I can remember very well, June Barry was very, very experienced and really helped us to explore these complex issues in a way that was accessible and understandable. It was both informative and fun, and I remember those fun years quite vividly.

GC:

Yeah, they were great years. They were very interesting, difficult years in some ways, but also great fun. And many friendships were made, indeed, including yourself. Just coming back to the development education project, Mariam, can you remember what were some of the issues that you, as a group, looked at at the time? If you can remember some examples.

MO:

We looked at social issues like gender inequality and human rights. We also talked a lot about political issues in our countries and also in Ireland. It was challenging, but I think it was a very worthwhile way of encouraging ourselves and others to understand development issues.

GC:

And you mentioned UCC students. What were you doing with them? Why were you working with UCC students at that time?

MO:

It was an interesting project. Those students were studying migration studies at UCC, and they also attended the workshops. We each partnered with a student there and worked on a different section of a set of guidelines about development education. We ended up with a published book, and I think it was a training manual, a kind of guide, called *Not Me, Us*—a development education session for older teenagers and adults. For example, a person from Myanmar did a session on genocide, and someone from Nigeria did a section on FGM, female genital mutilation. I also remember a young man from the Ivory Coast did a section on the impact of religious and cultural conflict on the lives of children and adults.

GC:

You have a great memory, Mariam! There were a lot of very interesting issues. I think what was so powerful about that particular series of workshops and that publication, which you put together as a group, was that it was a fantastic initiative. You were talking about real people with real experiences of forced migration, but also looking at it from a development education perspective. In that way, it was quite unique. I think it was unique because of the fact that what people had experienced—forced migration themselves—was central. I do think that was probably the first project of its kind, maybe the first one in Ireland where the focus was on development education, but with people who had been forced to move from their own countries for the reasons that you outlined, such as genocide, FGM, religious or cultural conflicts, wars, and so on. Yes, I do remember the people that you're talking about as well, many still in Ireland, thankfully, and doing very well—doing brilliantly, in fact, like yourself.

So, had you ever come across development education before this project?

MO:

No, I don't think so. No, I never heard of it before, but I thought it was a good way of helping us and helping others to understand very complex global issues. We did a lot of other work with you there too, like taking part in the Cork European City of Culture initiative in 2005 when Cork was the European Capital of Culture. We made a film about asylum seekers in Ireland. That's right, we did lots of campaigns and media work, for example, on the right to family reunification and the End Direct Provision campaign. The development education project was quite interesting, too, in that it had a different approach to learning. It was very engaging and participatory. It was a good training tool for working with groups in Ireland.

GC:

Yeah, I remember that. We also formed a speakers' panel, didn't we?

MO:

Yes, I was one of them. I really enjoyed that time. We formed a six-person speakers' panel, and we spoke to lots of groups, such as youth groups, schools, and colleges. I thought it was a great achievement. Sometimes we were able to run development education workshops with young people, for instance.

GC:

It was fantastic. The kind of methodologies that we had learned about in the development education workshops were methodologies that we were able to use again with young people in youth groups and also with others. As far as I remember, we worked with the Gardaí and with HSE workers and people like that as well. So yeah, there were a great group of people, really. And thanks for reminding me as well of the European Capital of Culture initiative because making that film with Frameworks Films, who were based in Cork, was a highlight. They must be given great credit for the most amazing work that they have done over the years. I'm very pleased to be able to mention them here on this program because really, they very much are people who have worked on development education as well over the years, very much with a local focus, but still, I would call it development education of a very high quality, and they are fantastic people to work with.

Such was the success of this project at the time, and I know we are probably remembering with rose-tinted glasses a bit, but we're entitled to because we worked hard. This project later allowed us to employ, with funding from Irish Aid, the first development education officer in a migrant organization. I do think it was the first of its kind, as I said. And of course, priorities in that organization later changed. But would you say a few things about NASC at that time?

MO:

Yeah, there were a lot of people coming in. Most people came to get information about living in Ireland. It gave people experience in education, on both speaking in public, learning English, and even learning Irish. I can remember some people had computer classes too. At the time, computers were just coming up, and we had computer classes as well. Then we had community development work and ran a lot of campaigns and social events. We also ran drama classes and all sorts of things. I remember the film that you mentioned earlier, and the campaigns, like the anti-racism workshop with the Gardaí. I really enjoyed that one with the Gardaí, and also working with students and

healthcare staff. There were also trips to the beach—like the one I remember very well, the one to Fota Island.

GC:

Yes, I remember that! That's fantastic, yeah. And Fota is here in East Cork as well, so good to mention it here on the radio.

MO:

Yeah, and we also published another training manual called *In Our Own Words*, based on the experiences of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers living in Ireland. We had about 300 people coming for one-to-one advice each month, and all sorts of subgroups were operating. It was a great place to be. It was like a home for me at the time. It was very dynamic and supportive, and I was fortunate to be the chairperson for a few years. By the time we left, myself and you, Gertrude Cotter, we had brought in almost a million a year. We employed nine staff at the time. I think it has more of a legal focus these days, but during those days, it was a challenging time, though we had some very good times too. I remember we were at Mary's of the Isles originally, and then we got funding, and we moved to another building because that particular place was very small. But we had a bigger space for people, so we were able to have the computer classes, people doing English classes, and I think we had sewing classes as well. So, there was a lot of things going on then. I still remember all those things. It was quite interesting. It was fun for people.

GC:

It was very dynamic. And I'm thinking of Christmas parties, and Santa, and all that as well, for the children, and all sorts of things. So many people contributed so much. Thanks for that trip down memory lane, Mariam.

MO:

It was a great time to remember. It was a great time, and I think, in a way, the broader work is actually included here because I suppose it is all part of a kind of development education picture, in a way, you know. And I'd like to pay tribute as well to your own incredible contribution for so many, many years. It's great to see you so successful as well since then.

GC:

You know, it's a great achievement, getting your solicitor exams there in the not-too-distant past. I know you studied as a barrister originally in your own country and had to kind of requalify. That's one of the difficulties of migration, isn't it? When you have to almost start again from scratch.

MO:

That's it, yes.

GC:

So, Mariam, would you like to add anything else at this stage?

MO:

Yes, because when I came into the country, I didn't have anywhere to go, and actually, I just wanted something because I was a qualified barrister back home before I came to Ireland. So, I was looking for a place where I could showcase what I could do, to help the migrants. When I went to NASC, and

I saw what they were doing, all the education and all that, I wanted to help. People were looking up to me, and I was helping them. Some people wanted to do sewing, others wanted to do drama, and they came to me. So, I was really part of NASC, and it helped, and even helped me to identify myself as someone who could help people and things like that. It was a great time for me, and I loved those years, though it was challenging. And you, Gertrude, were a very, very good part of those years. You made everything fulfilling for me to participate in things that I loved. So, it was a great time.

GC:

It was a great time. It was hard, as you said, but it was a great time. Listen, we'll leave it at that, Mariam. I think it's great that you were able to remember some of that work on development education so that we can contribute here to the history of development education in Ireland. And I just want to thank you for giving us your time tonight, and I look forward to seeing you again in the near future.

MO:

Thank you, Gertrude Cotter. Thank you.

GC:



With me now is Stephen McCloskey. Stephen has been director of the Centre for Global Education in Belfast since 1995. The Centre supports development education programs in the formal and informal education sectors. He is the editor of a development education journal called Policy and Practice, which is a leading voice for development education practitioners locally and internationally. This journal is in its 16th year of publication. Since 2011, Stephen has managed education programs in the Gaza Strip, Palestine, and Beirut, Lebanon, and is a regular visitor to the Middle East. His latest book, Global Learning and International Development Education in the Age of Neoliberalism, is being published by Routledge. He regularly writes for the Open Democracy website on poverty, social justice, and the Middle East.

Stephen McCloskey, you're very welcome to Community Radio Youghal.

Stephen McCloskey (SM):

Thank you very much, Gertrude. Great to be with you.

GC:

Yeah, and after that amazing introduction, I feel that there must be an awful lot to say, Stephen. I associate you with the development education sector for many, many years. I see that you started working in the Centre for Global Education in Belfast in 1995, which is, I think, 26 years ago. It's an amazing journey. So, before we go on to that, though, and your involvement in the sector in a kind of work capacity, could you talk to me a little bit about your own early kind of influences and where you grew up and what brought you to this kind of work?

SM:

Yes, I grew up, Gertrude, in West Belfast, and my family is from West Belfast. The family home is still there, and I went to a secondary school called La Salle. We grew up in a time of conflict, during the Troubles. Basically, from the point I was born onward until the late 90s, the conflict was ongoing. So,

when I was doing my A-Levels, for example, in the early 80s, the hunger strike was ongoing at that time. My school, La Salle, was located right in the centre of Andersonstown, so there was a huge amount of upheaval happening at that time. Everyone who went to this school, virtually, was politicized by what was happening and became aware of other countries or regions in conflict or in struggle across the world. We were aware of situations like Palestine, the campaign to end apartheid in South Africa, and so on. So, we had a very international mindset.

I suppose, before I went into development education, and when I went into the sector, this was all swirling about in my head, and I was attracted by the fact that development education was political. It was encouraging people to think critically, and it was encouraging people to take action. So, all of those things combined in the practice of Paulo Freire were hugely attractive, and that's really what lured me in. I almost went in directly from college. I had one job for about 18 months, and then after that, I went straight into what was then the One World Centre, which was one of about 45 or 46 development education centres in England, Scotland, Wales, and the north and south of Ireland. These were small DECs that provided training and resources on global issues.

GC:

That's an unusual journey, really, when you think about it, Stephen. Not an awful lot of people would go straight into something like the Centre for Global Education. I'm actually surprised to hear you saying that there were 45 or 46 One World Centres. It's an unusual step to take, but it must have been an exciting opportunity, and it must have been a really unusual job at the time. One that must have been hard to get. What did you train in at college? What was your discipline?

SM:

It was actually philosophy. But when I came out of university, there was this scheme set up by the Tories at the time called Action for Community Employment. I had an 18-month work placement in a community centre right smack in the middle of Ballymurphy. Ballymurphy is one of the most deprived communities, not only in West Belfast but in the whole of Northern Ireland. Again, it was a very heavily politicized community and right at the fulcrum of the conflict. So, there was always something happening during this time. There were always operations going on, against British foot patrols. You were seeing these things play out almost on a day-to-day basis in an area with really high levels of unemployment—and it still has those levels today.

GC:

So, did you find that people around you at the time were saying, "Well, look, here we are, we're unemployed, and there you are talking about global issues." Did you find that a bit of a problem when you explained to your friends what you were doing?

SM:

Not at all. I mean, I didn't really have development education at the forefront of my mind when I was working in Ballymurphy or when I was at college. But I had international issues and international situations like Cuba or Palestine or South Africa running around in my head. I regularly had political discourse with other students in school, or when I left school with co-workers. Even at that time, ordinary people were very heavily politicized, and they were steeped in the political situation because you had to be, because of the situation that we were living in. So that was how I approached development education, with that local scenario that shaped me.

GC:

Well, you certainly are steeped in the political upbringing, just by the very nature of where you were living, in the middle of conflict, which gives you a unique perspective when you visit places like Palestine, for instance. Stephen, tell me, you started working kind of officially, I think, in the Centre for Global Education in 1995. Could you tell us a little bit about the work you were doing there at the time, and maybe what you do now, just very briefly?

SM:

Well, I started out working in the Centre as a project officer, and my job was to produce a resource for primary school children that focused on geography and international development issues. The theme of the resource was water, so I had to pull together case studies on water that were both local and international. For example, I looked at the pollution of the River Foyle in Derry by a multinational corporation and created a case study around that scenario. All of the case studies were based on real situations that had happened recently. This program was a big program over three years, funded by the EU and by the Department of Education in the North. When that program ended, the director's post in the Centre became vacant, and I applied for that and got it, so I've been working in the Centre ever since then on a really diverse range of areas and with a lot of different responsibilities that have always made the job attractive and interesting, you know, both as a practitioner and a manager, and even, you know, developing skills in fundraising and project management and that kind of thing.

GC:

Tell me, are there many staff there at the moment, or has that gone up and down?

SM:

It has gone up and down over the years with the funding situation. I mean, the funding situation, more generally, in terms of the sector. So, at the beginning, we had just a couple of people working in the Centre. Then, around the end of the 90s when DFID (Department for International Development) was established, a lot more funding became available for development education at that time. We had several programs running at once, so the staff would go up to maybe six or seven. Then, when those programs ended after three years, typically, they would close, and the staff would lose their positions. That was just the nature of the sector, that this kind of project cycle of funding was really frustrating because you had staff with a lot of experience, skills, and expertise, and then you lost that because the funding disappeared. You weren't able to replace the funding because there were so few funders for development education work at that time.

GC:

And very few places for the staff who might have left their jobs to go to as well and continue to develop their careers. It certainly has been a big issue in the sector. Where is your funding from these days?

SM:

A mix of Irish Aid. We get Irish Aid funding for the Centre's journal Policy and Practice and some related seminars, and that represents a substantial part of our funding. Then we also get a big chunk of funding from the British government for a school's programme that's co-funded by the British Council and the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, which is a merger of the Foreign Office with DFID, which sadly was closed earlier this year by the current British government. So, it's a

mix of that. Then we get some trade union funding for overseas projects, and we get small project funding from NGOs and trust funds.

GC:

Do you work with schools or, you know, is it broader than that?

SM:

We work with schools in two ways. We provide CPD (continuing professional development) and we also manage a grant scheme that supports international partnerships. So local schools here have the opportunity to apply for a grant and to link with a school in the Global South, to establish a learning partnership with that school, and then there would be facilitated visits between the teachers in the South and the teachers here. But all of that has kind of ground to a halt because of the pandemic, because international travel hasn't been possible. So instead, we've had what are called supported partnerships, which are virtual. So the schools still link with schools in the Global South, but the partnerships are based on virtual learning.

GC:

And what would a typical partnership look like in that kind of context? I mean, is it the young people who are participating in this, or the teachers, or?

SM:

It's the young people who are central to it. It's really about learning the context in which students are living here and in the Global South, learning about cultures, lifestyles, and the issues that impact people in both contexts, and exchanging learning as well. In terms of teachers, it's about exchanging methodologies, classroom methodologies, and young people exchanging information about themselves and their lives.

GC:

Yeah. Policy and Practice as well, Stephen, as a practitioner in this area and as an academic, I find it an invaluable resource. When did that come about?

SM:

It came about in response to the Kenny Report, which was published by Dóchas in 2002. That report was commissioned by Dóchas into the state of the development education sector, and it identified a number of deficits in terms of professional development, communications, North-South links (both North-South of Ireland and North-South globally), and it recommended some approaches that could address those gaps. So, the Centre for Global Education went away and thought about the report and how it could make a contribution. We thought about a journal as a way of both enhancing communications and strengthening capacity. We also thought it could be an international journal as well as an Irish journal. So, we organized a feasibility study into the publication of a journal and whether it would work or not, which was commissioned by Irish Aid. Then finally, in 2005, we got the first grant to publish the journal. It really took off after that, and it's been a great success.

GC:

It really has. I mean, I find it invaluable for my own work. And tell me, in that time, you've been in the sector a long time. What are the bigger kind of changes that you've seen in the sector as a whole, in the development education sector?

SM:

Well, the biggest shift I would have seen was when I first came into the sector in the 90s, in the mid-90s, the development education work was largely supported by development NGOs, by development agencies. The 45 or 46 One World Centres I talked about earlier mostly depended on funding from NGOs. And then that situation started to change toward the end of the 90s and the early 2000s when DFID was established. More government support became available, both in the UK and in the South of Ireland, for development education. Then you began to see NGOs kind of retreating from development education and not supporting it as much. There was a shift then, an imbalance, in how we were funded, in the sense that we became heavily dependent on government support for development education, and we lost a lot of the NGO support, which meant we lost a lot of our independence.

But on the plus side, there was a government strategy for development education, there were very generous three-year grants available for development education, and there were mini-grants as well. These all came from London. At the same time, there were small grants available from Dublin as well for cross-border work. So, in that period from the late 90s through until sort of 2008, 2009, 2010, the sector went through a positive period of an infusion of support and growth and also professionalization. Then that began to unravel a lot after the 2008 global financial crisis. Unfortunately, of course, immediately the budget was slashed, development education funding started to go down, and in the British context, there was a review commissioned by the newly elected Tory government in 2010 of their support for development education. On the back of that review, they decided to no longer support it. The only thing that remained really were large, three-year formal sector programs delivered across the UK, but the grant schemes, they disappeared. So we basically contracted sharply as a sector, as much as we had grown sharply from 1997 through until 2008.

GC:

That's very interesting. I didn't realize it had been such a sharp change, and so quickly.

very interesting. I'd like to come on to some of the issues of interest that you have, particularly the whole area of economic growth, neoliberalism. Would you like to just talk to us about your interests there and where you see some of the challenges in our own sector?

SM:

Well, this has been a source of real frustration for me for a long time. The economic situation has deteriorated rapidly since 2008 in the sense that we have a lot more poverty in the Global North, and we have a lot more inequality. The economic model that underpins development—neoliberalism—has failed and failed badly. I mean, the economic system completely collapsed in 2008 and had to be bailed out by the state across the world, particularly in the United States and Britain. So, I suppose my frustration is that if this economic system is at the root of so much inequality, as it seems to be, then why isn't this economic model of neoliberalism central to development education practice and central to our discourse as development educators, in the sense of ourselves educating each other about how the system works and the impact that it has, both locally and globally?

GC:

And what do you think the answer to that question is?

SM:

I think they're afraid, basically. I think most development educators are afraid of straying into this area because they feel that it's political, and that it may stray away from what both government and NGOs consider to be the area that brings us most comfort, and that everyone agrees is our natural terrain, which is overseas development aid. So, it's okay, for example, to critique the government if it starts to cut the aid budget. But it's not okay if we start critiquing government policies, particularly domestic policies, that exacerbate poverty and accelerate neoliberalism. So, I think it's partly to do with the fact that it's considered to be part of the domestic arena, and it's also partly to do with how we're funded. Most of the development NGOs are heavily funded by government, and they're afraid, perhaps, that if they critique the government, then their funding might be jeopardized.

GC:

Absolutely, and I think it's something we can identify with here in Ireland as well. You mentioned some of the funders, and you can see that funders have their own agendas. But coming back to the sector itself and where we are now, what do you think the future is for development education? Where do you see it going from here?

SM:

I think there are a lot of challenges ahead. We've been very much marginalized since the global financial crisis, but I think the sector has been shrinking for a long time. The pandemic has had a major impact on our ability to engage with people in the ways that we would have done before, face-to-face learning. And now we're trying to operate in a virtual environment where you can't really replicate that interaction or the power of a classroom or a workshop where people can exchange experiences and really learn from each other. But also, you know, a lot of the public don't have confidence in online learning. So, I think there's a challenge around how we develop effective learning programs in this new environment, but I think the bigger challenge is getting the political will and funding for the kind of radical changes we need in the sector to tackle issues like neoliberalism, climate change, and inequality.

I think the future of development education is in working closely with social movements that are actively fighting for these kinds of changes, movements like the youth climate movement or the anti-racist movements. Development education needs to be more radical, more political, and more connected to those who are actually challenging the status quo. Otherwise, I fear that we will continue to be marginalized, and our ability to influence public opinion and policy will diminish.

GC:

I think that's really insightful, Stephen, and it's something we see here in Ireland as well. There's a real need to move from just the talk and the education side of things to action, to linking education with real, practical movements for change. You've been in the sector a long time, and you have a wealth of experience. What advice would you give to people working in development education, particularly those who are newer to the field, as to how they can approach the challenges you've talked about?

SM:

I think the first thing is to be courageous. You know, don't be afraid to engage with political issues, even if it feels risky. It's really important that we maintain our independence from government and from funders and that we stand up for the values of social justice and equality, even when it feels

difficult. The second thing is to stay connected to other practitioners and to social movements. Development education can sometimes feel a bit isolated because of the funding cuts and the shrinking of the sector, but there are a lot of people out there who are doing really important work in different areas—climate justice, anti-racism, gender equality. So, stay connected to those people, collaborate with them, and learn from them. And third, I think it's really important to keep learning yourself. The world is changing rapidly, and development education needs to evolve with it. So, keep reading, keep engaging with new ideas, and keep challenging your own thinking.

GC:

That's great advice, Stephen. Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts and experiences with us today. I think you've given us a lot to think about, and I really appreciate your time. Before we leave, is there a song that you would like us to play to close out the program?

SM:

Sure. Thank you, Gertrude, for the opportunity to speak with you. The song I've selected is *A Change Is Gonna Come* by Sam Cooke. It's a song that I think inspires hope, that there is the prospect of meaningful change to come in the future. So, I thought I'd select something with a more hopeful edge, rather than something maudlin that reflects a lot of the misery we're enduring at the moment. I find this song very inspiring, and I hope other people do too.

GC:

Well, thank you very much for that, Stephen. It's nice to end our conversation on a note of hope. Thank you again.

(Clip of *A Change Is Gonna Come* by Sam Cooke plays)