



A Resource for Higher Education Educators

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

TRANSCRIPTION

Programme 4: 1990s and 2000s

Guests: Peadar Kirby, Adrienne Boyle and Patsy Toland

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.



Peadar Kirby is Emeritus Professor of International Politics and Public Policy and Director of the Institute for the Study of Knowledge in Society at the University of Limerick. Peadar is very much associated with this community. So, first of all, I just want to say you're very welcome to The Global Hub and thank you for giving us your time."

Peadar Kirby (PK):

"Thank you, Gertrude."

GC:

"So Peadar, I'm asking people to start off with their early history, because I know you have a very interesting trajectory as well. Just bring us back to some of your early influences and experiences, whichever decades you'd like to start with."

PK:

"I suppose the thing that led me to travel to what we used to call the Third World was that I was studying theology. I was studying to be a priest back in the 1970s, mid-70s. I had studied a degree in history and politics in UCD, so I was very interested in international issues and international politics, and I was fascinated by Liberation Theology. This was my first time coming across Liberation Theology, and the reality of a church that was siding with the oppressed. Priests and bishops were being murdered by military governments, and it showed me that there was something really important happening here, and I needed to find out more for myself.

In those years, in my 20s, I didn't know anyone who had ever been to Latin America. It was a distant continent. I was also fascinated by the people who lived there before the European conquest. Of course, when I was studying history in UCD, the conquest of the Americas by the Spaniards and Portuguese awakened a fascination with the Aztecs, the Incas, the Mayas, and so many others. So, I suppose both of these were the influences that led me to give up my teaching job in 1978 and spend a year traveling around North America. That was the beginning of my immersion in what we then began to call 'development.'

I didn't think of it as anything to do with development back then—I didn't even quite know what development was—but I was fascinated with these very different parts of the world. I was so taken with it. I found the people to be so alive and vibrant, and the issues they were discussing were so

real compared to the rather false society I felt I had grown up in. It really gave me this love for Latin America, which has never left me and has marked my life very profoundly."

GC:

"As you say, the vibrancy and engagement are unforgettable. It's something visceral. You mentioned Liberation Theology—could you explain briefly for our listeners what Liberation Theology is, and would you agree that it has had a profound influence on the Development Education sector, particularly in the 70s and 80s?"

PK:

"Liberation Theology grew up in the late 1960s, primarily in Latin America, as a way of interpreting the Christian Gospel as a struggle for justice among the poor. It saw the core message of Jesus as being about justice and siding with the oppressed. Latin America was going through a difficult phase with many military dictatorships and widespread repression. So, this message, especially coming from a church that had often sided with the oppressors, was revolutionary. It had a huge influence on Latin America at the time, and I agree that it also had an impact in Europe and North America, where people brought those ideas back."

GC:

"Yes, it's interesting to hear that. I think many people in Ireland were very influenced by Liberation Theology and ideas like Paulo Freire's work in the 70s and 80s. Let's talk then about Dependency Theory. Could you explain what it is and how it influenced your thinking?"

PK:

"Dependency Theory developed as a critique of the dominant modernization theory, which said that societies should modernize. Many in Ireland, even today, believe that modernization is the goal. But Dependency Theory countered this, arguing that societies are constrained by their dependency on the flow of capital and investment from core countries like North America and Western Europe. This dependency shapes how countries develop and limits their ability to address their own needs. What I learned from Latin America was how much this applied to Ireland as well. It gave me insights into the structures that shape our society that I had never encountered in university."

GC:

"So obviously, it stayed with you, and you developed your professional academic career, and you've written a lot in this area. How do you feel about the whole discussion around development, development education, and all these terms? I'm sure you'd be quite critical. What does that word 'development' mean to you?"

PK:

"Of course, the word 'development' was taken from biology into economics and sociology, but only part of the concept was taken. Development in nature involves growth, but it also involves aging and death. However, in the context of economics, that part was left out. To me, increasingly, the project of development has been very destructive for countries and people throughout the world, including Ireland. It imposes a standard view of what we should aspire to—a particular version of the 'good life' and what it means to live well together. We don't get to discuss these questions anymore. We are just given assumptions, like the need for economic growth and rising income levels, with little attention to how that growth is distributed or whether it actually leads to better lives."

What development has often done is disrupt longstanding patterns of living, many of which were sustainable. These patterns grew up over centuries or millennia, with people living in some sort of balance with the ecosystems they inhabited. Then, so-called experts from the West, especially after World War II, came in and told them everything they were doing was wrong. They had to start using fertilizers, pesticides, and monoculture crops, all of which has had devastating consequences for both societies and the environment.

Unfortunately, I've come to the conclusion—and the statistics back this up—that those countries that have been most successful in terms of development are the ones that have moved furthest away from sustainability. On the other hand, the countries that remain sustainable are those that haven't been very successful in developing. So, I think we've completely failed in our understanding of development. If we are to use the word development at all, we need to recognize that it also involves a plateau, aging, and eventually, decline. We are now facing this endgame with climate change and biodiversity loss, and it's the development project, in many ways, that has brought us to this impasse."

GC:

"Absolutely. I suppose I see education in the area of global justice as being more of a critique of development rather than a promotion of it. Are we having serious conversations about these issues, politically or otherwise? In Ireland, for example, are we addressing these global challenges in a serious way?"

PK:

"I've given up on the mainstream media. You rarely, if ever, hear serious discussions of fundamental issues. It's all about celebrities or other distractions that keep us from facing the facts. The media is dominated by advertising, which is essentially commercial propaganda pushing us to buy more, and that's one of the reasons we're in the mess we're in. So, I consume as little media as possible if I want to maintain any sane perspective on the world.

Unfortunately, the problem extends to the academy as well. Our university system, not just in Ireland but globally, has been captured by a dominant commercial, scientific, and technological agenda. It's lost its critical edge, the space where alternative visions of society should be emerging. This isn't to say that there aren't critical thinkers in our universities—there are—but they are largely sidelined. The managerialism that has taken over our universities, with its focus on publishing in high-impact journals and measurable outputs, stifles true debate and innovation. It's really depressing, especially when the world so desperately needs robust alternatives to the techno-economic paradigm that dominates."

GC:

"President Michael D. Higgins has been giving very thoughtful and challenging speeches on this, talking about the need for critical thinking and asking, 'Where are the philosophers? Where are the critical voices?' Do you think he's being heard?"

PK:

"I agree that President Higgins articulates these issues far better than I do. But how much of his discourse is really being covered by the media? How many Irish citizens are even aware of what he's saying? Very few, I'd wager. There are critical voices out there, and there are excellent books being

published, but they don't get the attention they deserve. It's part of the broader problem I mentioned earlier."

GC:

"Are there any writers or thinkers today, either in Ireland or internationally, who you believe are addressing these issues in a meaningful way?"

PK:

"I recently read Jason Hickel's book *Less is More*, which I think is really insightful. But to be honest, I find more serious, critical thinking in French and Spanish literature. I teach in the University of Valencia in Spain, and I find that there's a much more robust critique of the dominant paradigm there. Students are much more aware of these issues than in Ireland. The English-speaking world is not well-served by its literature on this front. It's not that there aren't good critiques in English—there are, like Tim Jackson's latest book, which is fantastic—but it's not as developed as in other languages."

GC:

"That's an interesting observation. Are you suggesting that the English language itself somehow limits the critique, or is it more about the historical and cultural context of English-speaking countries?"

PK:

"It's both. On the one hand, I think there's a stronger tradition of critical thinking in French and Spanish, rooted in their philosophical traditions. But on the other hand, English is a language that has been dominated by the experiences of empire and dominance, particularly British and later American. All languages embody a worldview shaped by the history and power of the societies that speak them. So, it's no surprise that English has been taken over by the illusions of the techno-economic paradigm more than other languages. There's also less critical space in the English-speaking world for alternative visions. I've been particularly shocked by the passivity I see in many students today."

GC:

"It's surprising to hear that, especially given the rising awareness around issues like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and climate change among young people."

PK:

"Yes, but I think we've sold young people a very narrow vision of what education is—just a means to get qualifications and a job, nothing more. Education should be about opening your eyes to the world, and we're failing to prepare this generation for the profound challenges ahead. They are being educated for a society that is fast disappearing, and we're not giving them the tools to shape the new world they're going to face. There are some signs of hope—movements like Extinction Rebellion and the school strikes—but by and large, we're not equipping them to deal with the climate crisis and biodiversity loss."

GC:

"If you were to look for leadership on these issues in Ireland today, where would you find it?"

PK:

"That's a difficult question. It's hard to find leaders who are truly addressing these issues in a meaningful way. There are some critical voices, but they're few and far between."

GC:

"I completely agree, and it's something we need to talk about more. Peadar, I just want to thank you for this conversation and for all your contributions over the years. It's been a real privilege to have you on The Global Hub. Thank you so much."

PK:

"Thank you, Gertrude. It's been a pleasure."

GC:



"Now, we're going to move on to our next guest, Adrienne Boyle, who is a community activist in the area of global citizenship and development education. Adrienne, first of all, thank you very much for being with us, and welcome to The Global Hub."

Adrienne Boyle (AB):

"Thank you, Gertrude. It's great to be here."

GC:

"Adrienne, you're one of the first people who came to my mind when I started thinking about people who have contributed significantly to this sector. I'm really happy to have you here. You're someone who is synonymous with this field. Could you start by telling us about your early influences, as far back as you'd like to go, and how they brought you into the area of global justice?"

AB:

"Well, I remember being very young, about seven, and wanting to be a suffragette. I saw something about suffragettes somewhere, and I thought, 'That's it. I want to be a suffragette.' I remember reading about them, thinking they were amazing for chaining themselves to railings. That was an early influence. I was from a poor background, economically speaking—inner city, working class—but culturally, my parents were very engaged and committed. I had that influence from both my mother and father.

Then, as a young teenager, I remember the Biafra crisis. It was all over the news, and I saw those black-and-white images of starving people. That made a huge impact on me. Later on, it was Vietnam. I was a student in the late 60s, and I was very much engaged in the activism around Vietnam. I became much more involved in campaigning during that time, driven by a sense of injustice."

GC:

"It's fascinating how those early experiences of injustice stay with you. The Biafra crisis and Vietnam were such defining moments for so many people."

AB:

"Yes, and I think growing up with poverty around me and experiencing hunger myself, those things really shape you. You carry that sense of injustice with you."

GC:

"It's interesting how those early influences, whether it's poverty or injustice, shape your worldview. When did you first start getting involved in a more organized or voluntary capacity? Was it during college, or perhaps afterward?"

AB:

"Yes, it was during college, around the Vietnam War protests. I was very active during that time, organizing and campaigning. Later on, in the 70s, I became more involved in solidarity movements and, in particular, refugee solidarity. I worked with a group called INCORE and other solidarity groups at the time, particularly with the refugee situation that started to grow in Ireland. This would have been the early 90s when the country began seeing a rise in non-white immigrants.

I also became more involved with grassroots movements. Around 2005, I started doing strategic planning work for smaller groups, which brought me into closer contact with the development education sector. One major turning point for me was when I came across an advertisement for a strategic planning position with a little-known group called IDEA, the Irish Development Education Association. At that time, IDEA had nothing—it was a blank slate. I applied for the role and was called in for what I thought would be a casual chat, but it turned out to be a formal interview."

GC:

"I can only imagine how nerve-wracking that must have been, especially since you didn't expect it to be so formal!"

AB:

"Yes, it was a bit of a shock! But thankfully, I got the job. That's how I became the first director of IDEA. My role was to help set up the organization, structure it, and get it visible, organized, and inclusive. During my time there, I travelled around the country—Belfast, Cork, Galway, Dublin—and held focus groups with people in the sector. It was amazing to see how much incredible work was being done, but it was also clear that these efforts needed more organization and support. That was my job: to help coordinate all these brilliant people and create a cohesive structure."

GC:

"It's amazing to think that you were involved in the early days of IDEA, which is now such a vibrant and impactful organization. Your work clearly laid the foundation for what it has become today."

AB:

"Yes, it was a lot of hard work in those early years, but I truly believe that taking the time to properly consult with people, build trust, and create something with a strong foundation has paid off in the long term. I think the slow, thoughtful work at the beginning is crucial for the success of any

initiative. Now IDEA is a thriving organization with a clear focus on policy and practice, as well as a vibrant network of people who are passionate about development education."

GC:

"Absolutely. And what about the changes you've seen in the sector over the years? You mentioned before how the landscape has shifted."

AB:

"Yes, I've seen the sector move from being a bit fragmented, with people working in isolation, to something much more networked and supportive. Nowadays, you have a lot of webinars, networking opportunities, and capacity-building initiatives. It's wonderful to see new people coming into the field, young people bringing fresh energy and ideas. The sector feels much more cohesive now. It's almost become a true community, which is something I'm very proud to have been a part of."

GC:

"That's great to hear. It must be exciting to see the sector evolve and grow. What's your involvement with it now?"

AB:

"I'm still quite involved, though I'm trying to take on less these days. I'm part of the panel working on the Code of Good Practice with IDEA, and I do some work for Irish Aid, like evaluations and grant assessments. I also stay active in the community, volunteering my time in some of IDEA's working groups. It's really rewarding, but I'm trying to strike a better balance now. It's hard to step back when you care so much about the work."

GC:

"I can imagine. It's hard to say no when you've been so deeply involved for so many years. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we finish?"

AB:

"I would just encourage people to get involved in global issues and look beyond themselves. Even small actions can make a difference. The power of one is very real, but it's even better when we come together as a collective to take action. I think people sometimes underestimate the impact they can have."

GC:

"That's a beautiful message, Adrienne. Thank you so much for sharing your experiences and wisdom with us. It's been an absolute pleasure speaking with you."

AB:

"Thank you, Gertrude. It's been wonderful to be here."

GC:



"Now, we're moving on to our final guest, Patsy Toland. Patsy began his career as a secondary school teacher in geography and special needs in Lucan, County Dublin, and took a career break to work on a new therapeutic centre with the HSE for young offenders. He later worked with Self Help Africa and is now based in Donegal, where he's involved in various community and development education projects. He's also a musician and photographer. Patsy, you're very welcome to The Global Hub."

Patsy Toland (PT):

"Thanks, Gertrude. It's great to be here, and I love that we're connecting the north and south of the country through these conversations."

GC:

"It's lovely to have you here, Patsy. I've followed your work over the years, and it's a real privilege to have you on the program. Could you start by telling us about your early influences and how you got into this line of work?"

PT:

"Well, I think it all goes back to my mother. She was a great reader and a strong pacifist, and I think that sense of helping others came from both her and my father. My dad ran a shop, and he was always looking after people, making sure they were okay. That sense of community and helping others was ingrained in me from a young age."

When I became a teacher, particularly as a geography teacher, I was naturally drawn to the global issues of inequality and injustice. I also spent a lot of time working with special needs students, and that experience further strengthened my belief in equality and empowerment. I think there was always something in me that wanted to help those who struggled to cope with the normal structures of society."

GC:

"That's such an important foundation to have, both from your family and your early career. How did your transition into development education happen?"

PT:

"It wasn't something I planned at first. It was more of a gradual process. I was teaching in Lucan, and one of my colleagues, Dáithí O'Hé, had worked with Concern in Bangladesh. He came back to the school and started raising awareness about global issues. We set up some support for him, and that was my first real introduction to development work."

Later, after I left teaching, I was at a bit of a crossroads, wondering whether to return to teaching or do something else. That's when Dáithí mentioned Self Help Africa, where he was working at the time. They were looking for someone with an education background, and that's how I got involved with them in 2002. I really liked the idea of bringing my 20 years of education experience to the field of development, especially since a lot of people in the sector didn't have a formal background in education."

When I started with Self Help Africa, I got my first real encounter with development education. I visited Uganda in 2002, and that trip made a big impression on me. I remember standing in a field with a man who was talking about growing pineapples and finding cures for his cattle. He kept saying, 'We have to do this because there is no money,' and I found myself thinking about what he meant by that. My first instinct was, 'Of course there's money—there's always money.' But then I realized, he was speaking about his reality, one that I had never fully understood.

It reminded me of something my father used to say when I was growing up: 'There was no money.' It struck me that this man in Uganda wasn't that different from my dad in rural Donegal. The circumstances may have been different, but the essence was the same—there was a need to be self-sufficient, to be resourceful. From that moment on, I never saw the difference between us and the people I was meeting. I never thought of them as people to be saved."

GC:

"That's such a powerful realization, especially in the context of development work, where the 'white savior' mentality is often a concern. How did that experience shape your perspective on development?"

PT:

"It was a huge turning point for me. I realized that development wasn't about us coming in to save people or tell them what to do. It was about partnership, learning from each other, and sharing knowledge. One of the things I liked most about Self Help Africa was that they didn't have Irish staff on the ground in the countries they worked in. Everything was run by local people—local directors, local staff. It was truly about empowerment and local ownership.

For me, development became about meeting people as equals. I saw the similarities between us rather than focusing on the differences. I learned that in many cases, the communities we were working with had retained a sense of community and simplicity that we had lost in Ireland. In some ways, I felt like I was learning more from them than they were from us."

GC:

"That's a beautiful way to look at it. It shifts the focus from a top-down approach to something much more collaborative and respectful. Are you still involved in this kind of work today?"

PT:

"Yes, I'm still involved, though in a more community-based capacity now. After taking redundancy from Self Help Africa in 2014, I moved back to Donegal and got involved with a project called ChangeMakers. It's a collaboration between Self Help Africa, the Donegal ETB, and the Inishowen Development Partnership. We focus on bringing development education to adult learners, and it's been really successful.

One of the things I love about ChangeMakers is that we've created a model that can work anywhere in Ireland. It's a three-legged stool: adult education, local development, and NGO expertise. This partnership has allowed us to reach people who wouldn't normally engage with global issues. We're helping people see the connections between local and global problems, and it's been incredibly rewarding."

GC:

"That sounds like such an impactful project, especially since you're working with adult learners who might not have been exposed to these ideas before. Can you tell us more about your involvement in the local community?"

PT:

"Yes, I'm very active in my local community in Donegal. We have an amazing community center here that runs a community garden and pantry. The pantry takes food donations from Tesco, Lidl, and Aldi—food that would otherwise be thrown away—and distributes it to people in need. It's a simple concept, but it's been so impactful for the local community. I'm also involved in the community garden, where people can come and learn about growing their own food. It's all about building resilience and self-sufficiency at the local level.

I also stay connected with schools through the networks I used to work with. I still do some work with Self Help Africa, but most of my involvement now is local, working with communities and adult learners."

GC:

"You've clearly had a long and varied career in this field, from working in schools to community development and development education. Is there anything else you'd like to share before we wrap up?"

PT:

"I think the main thing I'd like to emphasize is the importance of community. Whether it's a small village in Uganda or a rural community in Donegal, the sense of connection and mutual support is what keeps people going. Development education has a role to play in helping people see the bigger picture, but it's also about fostering those local connections. We need to be working together, locally and globally, to create a fairer and more sustainable world."

GC:

"Thank you so much, Patsy. It's been an absolute pleasure hearing about your experiences and the incredible work you've done over the years. Your story is truly inspiring, and I'm sure our listeners will take a lot away from it."

PT:

"Thank you, Gertrude. It's been great to be here."

GC:

"That brings us to the end of this episode of The Global Hub. I want to thank all our guests today—Peadar Kirby, Adrienne Boyle, and Patsy Toland—for sharing their stories and insights with us. As always, we hope these conversations spark new ways of thinking about global justice, development education, and the role we can all play in creating a better world.

Thanks for listening, and we'll see you next time."