



A Resource for Higher Education Educators

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

TRANSCRIPTION

Programme 6: Recent times

Guests: Laura Power, Dr Su-Ming Khoo and Eric Ehigie

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.

GC:



With me now is Laura Power. Laura Power works at WorldWise Global Schools. First of all, I want to say, Laura, you're very welcome to the Global Hub program here at Community Radio Youghal.

Laura Power (LP):

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

GC:

Thank you so much for joining us. As you know, this is a series of programs on the history of development and global citizenship education in Ireland, and you're part of that story. WorldWise Global Schools is, and so are you. So, could you tell our listeners, first of all, what does WorldWise Global Schools do?

LP:

Absolutely. So, WorldWise Global Schools—well, I'm one of four education officers. I'm based in the South of Ireland. I have two colleagues in the East, and I have one other colleague covering the West and the Midlands. What we do is, we are Ireland's national global citizenship education program for post-primary schools. We were established in 2013, and we're funded by Irish Aid. So, we are very much the connection between the Department of Foreign Affairs, Irish Aid, and post-primary schools in Ireland regarding delivering quality global citizenship education.

Since we were established, we've worked with over 70% of post-primary schools nationwide so far.

GC:

Wow, that's amazing, isn't it? That's fantastic.

LP:

Yeah, it's absolutely fantastic.

GC:

The aim coming from Irish Aid and the Department of Foreign Affairs is to integrate quality global citizenship education into all aspects of teaching and learning at post-primary level. So that's what you're about at WorldWise Global Schools, right?

LP:

Exactly.

GC:

So, you were established in 2013. It's relatively recent, isn't it?

LP:

Yes, relatively recent. Before WorldWise Global Schools was formed, there was a program called Léargas that was focused on global school partnerships. But what they found when reflecting on that program was that schools were spending perhaps a little bit too much time organizing trips and focusing on that element, rather than engaging with the critical theory and the global issues at hand. That's where the idea of WorldWise Global Schools was born. So now, as a result of that learning, we offer a lot of support, including grant funding, teacher training events, resources, and personalized support from the education officers as well.

GC:

You're doing absolutely fantastic work. I can't believe how vibrant the education sector has become. I think your work is a large part of that. I mean, to think that 70% of schools are engaging—that's amazing.

LP:

Yeah, and it's still growing! Thanks a million. I think it's fantastic. From a teacher's perspective, and a student's perspective as well, they're now being provided with the space for critical understanding of global issues. They are learning how to integrate these critical understandings into their teaching. Students today are so mobilized; providing them with a framework that they can work within, and then allowing them to take action, it's just amazing. It's something I would have loved when I was in secondary school.

GC:

You've created a really nice framework for this. But before we dive into that, let's talk about you. I like to ask people about their early influences and what brought them into this kind of work. I'd be very interested to hear your own story, if you're willing to share it with us.

LP:

Absolutely. Well, to be honest, Gertrude, it goes back to when I was in secondary school. I didn't know what development education was at the time. I didn't know what global citizenship education was. But I was very interested in current affairs and civic engagement. I got involved with the Green Schools committee and Fairtrade initiatives. But, you know, what I didn't have back then—and I think this might be something we come back to later—is the solidarity approach.

Back then in secondary school, it was all about fundraising. At the time, it was well-intentioned, but what was missing for me was that critical solidarity approach. That piece fell into place for me when

I went to college at University College Cork (UCC). While I was always interested in these global issues, it was studying politics and English at UCC that really introduced me to critical theory. The politics module there also covered government history and philosophy, and it was that philosophical element that really connected the dots for me.

When I encountered critical theory, I remember thinking, "This is what's been missing all along!" It opened my eyes to understanding the complexity of these issues, deconstructing them, and unlearning old perspectives. That for me was the key. I realized how lucky I was to have the privilege of thinking critically. That's not something everyone has the opportunity to do, you know? The privilege to deconstruct your thoughts, explore new perspectives, and think deeply about the root causes of issues. That's where it all started for me.

GC:

That's fantastic, Laura. So, you said you started at UCC. Did you focus on this kind of thinking from the very start?

LP:

Yes, exactly. My dissertation was focused on critical theory, specifically looking at gender oppression. I did a critical analysis on that topic. I was engaging with methodologies related to epistemic injustice, which today we might call unconscious bias. At the time, I didn't know that this was related to global citizenship education or development education. But I was already exploring the root causes of these issues, thinking horizontally, and making connections. That experience really set me on the path to where I am today.

GC:

And when did you start working at WorldWise Global Schools?

LP:

I joined recently, but before that, I worked in facilitator roles. I ran workshops in schools around Ireland on gender equality and ethical consumption. I also worked for Suas, coordinating their overseas volunteer program, where I looked at development from the perspective of the volunteers, integrating global citizenship education into their work.

GC:

I should mention for our listeners that GCE stands for Global Citizenship Education. Sometimes we forget to explain the acronyms! So, you had a variety of early influences, but it was really during your time at third level that you were exposed to critical theory. Was there anything in particular about how you were taught that really stood out to you? Was it the time you had to think, or was there something about the way it was taught that had a big impact?

LP:

It was a combination of things. I had a fantastic English teacher in secondary school who once told us, "You're not rote learners." That really stuck with me. When I got to third level, I had space to think critically, and my philosophy lecturers were instrumental in exposing me to different ideas and theories. I came from a DEIS school, and I was the first in my family to attend third level, so I wasn't really exposed to that kind of critical thinking before.

GC:

So how do you translate these complex ideas into a second-level context? How do you get students to engage with these critical ideas without making it overly complicated?

LP:

It really comes down to our framework. We have a very strong guiding principle around critical approaches. We draw a lot from Paulo Freire, who talks about the pedagogy of the oppressed and how students aren't just passive recipients of knowledge. We move away from rote learning and banking knowledge. Instead, we focus on dialogue and problem-posing approaches. This creates a connection to reality for students, and allows them to think critically, reconstruct their ideas, and engage in transformative learning.

An example of how we do this is by helping students move away from a charity model, where the focus is on fundraising and "helping others," which can distance them from the real issues. Instead, we promote a solidarity approach, where students understand the systemic causes of issues like tax injustice or unfair trade practices. For instance, we explain that while aid to developing countries might be 125 billion, 3.3 trillion is taken from these countries due to unfair trade and tax practices. That helps students critically examine the root causes of injustice.

GC:

You've got a really strong framework there. It's very clear that you're positioning yourselves within a human rights or solidarity framework. You're not neutral. You're critiquing systems, and that's where the power of development education comes in.

LP:

Yes, exactly. That critical voice is key to what we do. Development and global citizenship education can be so powerful when framed through that critical lens. And you're right, historically, it hasn't always been as present at the second level as we would like. But that's changing. And we're seeing teachers and students engage with these critical perspectives in really meaningful ways. It's part of that broader societal shift, I think.

GC:

Have you seen any big changes over the last few years? I know you haven't been in the sector for a huge number of years, but from your own experience, are young people engaging with these issues differently than they did before? Do you see a big shift?

LP:

Absolutely, I do. I think the engagement from young people today is incredible. Social media has had a huge influence on this as well. When I was in school, I looked up to people like Barack Obama as an example of civic engagement and change. But I also remember thinking, "Why isn't there someone in Ireland I can look up to in the same way?" Today's students have access to so much more information and are more aware of global issues. But I think what's really changed is that students now have more frameworks and support to take action, to engage critically with issues like climate change, racial injustice, and economic inequality. They're not just learning about these topics—they're mobilizing.

GC:

You're right. Social media has certainly opened up access to information and engagement with global issues. So, what else would you say is key to the work you're doing at WorldWise Global Schools?

LP:

I think the most important thing we do is make these issues accessible. We help teachers and students connect the dots between what's happening globally and what's happening in their own communities. A big part of our work is reframing the conversation so that students don't feel overwhelmed by the scale of global challenges. Instead, we help them see that small actions can lead to significant change. We encourage critical thinking, yes, but also action—whether that's within their school, their community, or beyond.

GC:

That's such an important message. Small actions really can lead to big change. I'm sure many of our listeners will resonate with that. Laura, you've given us such a good sense of your work and where your thinking has come from. It's been a real pleasure talking to you. Thank you so much for your time and for sharing your insights with us.

LP:

Thank you, Gertrude. It's been lovely speaking with you too.

GC:



Next up, we have Dr Su-Ming Ku, who is a senior lecturer in sociology at the National University of Ireland, Galway. Dr Ku has been a key figure in the field of development and global citizenship education, and it's a real honour to have her on the show. Su-Ming, welcome to The Global Hub.

Su-Ming Ku (SK):

Thank you for inviting me, Gertrude. It's wonderful to be here.

GC:

We're so glad to have you. Su-Ming, you've made such a significant contribution to development education in Ireland, and I'd love to start by asking you about your early background. What brought you into this field? What were your early influences?

SK:

Well, I was born and grew up in Malaysia during the 1960s, and at that time, Malaysia was a lower-middle-income country. It was an economically ambitious country that had been steadily developing since gaining independence in the 1950s. My family background is Chinese, and I'm a fifth-generation descendant of Chinese immigrants who settled in Malaysia in the 19th century. My

parents both received British colonial scholarships and became part of the professional class that was tasked with leading the country's development post-independence.

Education was highly valued in my family. My parents, having come from a diasporic background with some insecurity about their place in society, saw education as a way to ensure a better future for my brother and me. I was fortunate to attend a strict government school in Malaysia where I received an English-medium education until I was a teenager. Then, like many Chinese Malaysian parents at the time, my mother sent my brother and me to England for boarding school.

GC:

That's fascinating. It sounds like education played a central role in your life from a very early age.

SK:

Yes, absolutely. But the real turning point for me came when I chose my own school in England. My mother allowed me to pick the school, and I ended up choosing Dartington Hall School, which was a progressive, utopian school that had a profound impact on me. It was founded as part of a broader utopian experiment after World War I, focused on arts, education, and rural development. It was a unique place where education was closely linked with creativity and social transformation.

GC:

Dartington Hall—what an interesting choice. Can you tell us a bit more about what it was like there?

SK:

Dartington Hall was an extraordinary place. It wasn't just a school; it was part of a larger community that included an art college, a music college, workshops for handicrafts, and working farms. Education there was very much about nurturing the whole person, not just academic achievement. It was an environment that fostered a love of learning and a deep commitment to social justice and environmental sustainability.

The school didn't exist in isolation—it was part of a utopian vision of how society could be organized differently. And that vision really stayed with me. It instilled in me a lifelong interest in education as a transformative tool for social change.

GC:

That's incredible. So, Dartington Hall was really where your interest in education began to take shape in a profound way. How did that lead you into development education?

SK:

Yes, Dartington Hall had a huge influence on my educational philosophy. After finishing my A-levels, I wasn't quite sure what direction to take. I spent a year doing a foundation course in art, and then I went to university to study anthropology. My choice of anthropology was somewhat serendipitous—I picked it because it was the first subject on the list that seemed interesting to me! But anthropology turned out to be the perfect discipline for exploring my interests in culture, society, and development.

I went on to do a PhD in sociology, and my research focused on development. Specifically, I was interested in how different people and societies understand and define development. Growing up in a country like Malaysia, where development was a central goal, I saw that "development" meant

different things to different people. My research was about unpacking those meanings and exploring the different models and pathways of development that were being promoted.

GC:

And that was really the starting point of your work in development education, wasn't it? You were exploring development from a sociological and anthropological perspective.

SK:

Exactly. My interest in development was always rooted in understanding how societies change and how they define progress. Development education, for me, is about education that leads to transformative outcomes for society. It's about critiquing existing models of development and imagining alternative futures that are more just and equitable.

GC:

That's so important. What's the distinction, in your view, between development studies and development education?

SK:

That's a great question. Development studies is more about studying development as a field—analysing different models, critiquing policies, and examining the impacts of development on different societies. Development education, on the other hand, is more focused on activating citizenship and encouraging people to engage with global issues in a way that leads to transformative change. It's not just about learning—it's about action and responsibility.

Development education has a critical role to play in higher education, especially in fostering active citizenship and promoting a deeper understanding of social justice issues. I think it's crucial that we bring this kind of education into our universities, not just at the school level.

GC:

That's such a powerful way to frame it. Development education isn't just about learning about global issues—it's about engaging with them and taking action. How do you see development education evolving in the context of third-level institutions in Ireland?

SK:

I think there's still a lot of work to be done in terms of integrating development education into the higher education curriculum. Universities tend to be very focused on subject-specific knowledge and research, which is important, of course. But development education brings something else to the table—it emphasizes critical thinking, ethical responsibility, and the role of education in shaping a more just society.

At the moment, we don't have a clear framework for how development education should be incorporated into higher education. But I think that's changing. There's a growing recognition that universities have a role to play in promoting active citizenship and preparing students to engage with the complex global challenges we're facing today.

GC:

Yes, and as you said earlier, development education brings a social justice lens to higher education that can really enrich students' learning experiences. It's about more than just qualifications—it's about shaping engaged, responsible citizens.

SK:

Absolutely. Development education encourages students to think beyond their immediate context and to consider their role in a global society. It asks them to engage with the world as active participants, not just passive observers. And in that sense, it can be incredibly empowering.

GC:

Well, Su-Ming, thank you so much for sharing your insights with us today. It's been a fascinating conversation, and I know our listeners will take a lot away from it. Thank you for your time and for contributing to this important series.

SK:

Thank you, Gertrude. It's been a pleasure to be part of the conversation.

GC:



Next, I'm delighted to introduce our final guest today, Eric Ehigie, who is currently based in Belgium but is a student at NUI Galway. Eric is a third-year corporate law student, the politics coordinator for Black and Irish, as well as a podcaster and writer. You are certainly a busy person, Eric! Welcome to the program.

Eric Ehigie (EE):

Thank you so much, Gertrude. It's a pleasure to be here.

GC:

It's great to have you on The Global Hub. We're doing a series of programs on the history of development and global citizenship education in Ireland, and it's really important to have voices like yours, representing the younger generation and giving us insights into what's happening today. So, let's dive right in—when I say "global citizenship" or "development education," what does that mean to you personally?

EE:

Great question. When I think of development education, I think of education as a tool for social progress. It's about recognizing education's role not just in terms of individual success or professional advancement, but in contributing to wider social change. Development education, for me, is about how we use education to address social, economic, and environmental challenges, both locally and globally.

As for global citizenship, it's about recognizing that we're all part of a global community. It's about understanding that our actions, wherever we are in the world, have ripple effects, and that we have

a responsibility to consider the needs and rights of our global neighbours. So, when I hear those terms, I think of education as a key tool for fostering active, responsible global citizens.

GC:

That's a really clear and thoughtful perspective. You're involved in so many initiatives that connect with these ideas—can you tell us a bit about your role as the politics coordinator for Black and Irish?

EE:

Absolutely. Black and Irish is an organization that was founded in the summer of 2020, in response to the global Black Lives Matter movement and its impact here in Ireland. It started as a social media platform where Black and mixed-race Irish people could share their stories, experiences, and perspectives. The goal was—and still is—to show that Black Irish people are just as much a part of the fabric of Irish society as anyone else, and to challenge stereotypes and discrimination.

My role as the politics coordinator involves promoting political education within the Black Irish community and advocating for greater representation. We work to ensure that the voices of the Black and mixed-race community are heard and that we're represented in political and social conversations about the future of Ireland. A big part of our work is also about fostering better race relations and integration, helping all communities feel like they belong in the Irish national story.

GC:

That sounds like vital work, especially in today's climate. What are some of the main challenges that Black Irish people are facing in Ireland right now?

EE:

There are several challenges, but one of the biggest is racial discrimination, especially in the labour market. Many Black Irish people, particularly those who are new to the country or are first-generation immigrants, face significant barriers when it comes to finding employment or progressing in their careers. There's also the challenge of navigating identity—what does it mean to be Black and Irish? How do you claim your place in Irish society when, for so long, Irishness has been associated with a particular, narrow set of characteristics?

We're also seeing issues with integration in education, housing, and other areas of public life. For many Black Irish people, particularly younger generations, there's a strong sense of exclusion from the broader narrative of what it means to be Irish. At Black and Irish, we're trying to redefine that narrative, to show that Irishness is not a fixed concept, but one that can evolve to include people from all backgrounds.

GC:

That's such an important point. And, of course, racism is something that exists in many countries, not just Ireland. What do you think is at the root of racism? Why does it persist in societies today?

EE:

Racism is incredibly complex, and there are many factors that contribute to it. One of the main drivers, I think, is insecurity—people feel insecure about their own position in society, about their economic or social standing, and they project that insecurity onto others. It's a way of creating a false sense of power or superiority. Historically, we've seen how those in power have used race as a

tool to divide people—particularly in contexts like colonialism and slavery, where race was constructed as a way to justify exploitation.

I think another key factor is fear—fear of the unknown, fear of change, and fear of losing power or privilege. Racism often stems from a lack of understanding or exposure to people from different backgrounds. That’s why education is so crucial in dismantling racist attitudes. When people learn about different cultures, histories, and experiences, it breaks down the barriers that racism creates.

GC:

Yes, absolutely. And I really like how you frame racism as rooted in insecurity and fear—it’s not always about explicit hatred, but often about deeper, more subtle dynamics. You also touched on something really interesting: the role of class. Do you think class plays a role in how racism manifests in Ireland?

EE:

Definitely. Class and race are deeply interconnected, not just in Ireland but globally. In many ways, racism serves to uphold existing class structures. Historically, we’ve seen how the ruling class has used race to divide the working class, to prevent solidarity between people of different races who are facing similar economic struggles.

In Ireland, we’ve seen how some populist political figures try to pit working-class Irish people against immigrants, suggesting that immigrants are to blame for issues like housing shortages or unemployment. Of course, that’s not true—those problems are systemic and have more to do with economic policy than immigration. But it’s a convenient narrative for those in power because it distracts from the real causes of inequality.

GC:

That’s so true, and it’s something we’ve seen play out in many parts of the world. I’m really interested in hearing your thoughts on how we can start to break down those narratives—how can we address both racism and classism in a meaningful way?

EE:

I think it starts with education—helping people to understand the real causes of inequality and giving them the tools to think critically about the narratives they’re being fed. It’s about fostering solidarity between different groups and encouraging people to see that their struggles are interconnected.

It also requires political leadership. We need leaders who are willing to stand up and challenge racism and classism, who are committed to creating a more just and equitable society. And finally, it’s about creating spaces for dialogue, where people from different backgrounds can come together, share their experiences, and learn from each other. It’s through those conversations that we can start to dismantle the fear and insecurity that fuels racism.

GC:

I couldn’t agree more. Eric, thank you so much for sharing your insights with us today. It’s been an incredibly enlightening conversation, and I’m sure our listeners will have taken a lot from it. Thank you for being part of The Global Hub.

EE:

Thank you, Gertrude. It's been a pleasure to be here.

GC:

That's it for this episode of The Global Hub. A huge thank you to my guests, Laura Power, Dr Su-Ming Ku, and Eric Ehigie, for their contributions to today's conversation. As always, I encourage our listeners to continue these discussions in their own communities. Until next time, I'm Gertrude Cotter, and you've been listening to The Global Hub on community radio, Youghal 104 FM. Goodbye.