

# ADVANCING INTERNATIONALIZATION AT HOME FROM DIFFERENT ROLES: AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. JOS BEELEN

---

LAURA BAUMVOL

*University of British Columbia*



This interview was conducted via video. Watch the video by scanning the QR Code in your mobile device or using the following link:

<https://journals.lib.sfu.ca/index.php/sfuer/article/view/1105/694>



## Introduction

The SFU Ed Review Journal interviewed Dr. Jos Beelen for this Special Issue on Internationalization of Higher Education. The interview was conducted via video<sup>1</sup> by Dr. Laura Baumvol.

Dr. Beelen is Professor of Global Learning at The Hague University of Applied Sciences. He leads a research group that explores internationalisation at home, particularly the skills of lecturers to develop and teach internationalised curricula. Action research is a key method for this research theme. Another research theme is the continuum of internationalisation, from primary to tertiary education. Jos has published a range of articles on the implementation of internationalisation at home, both from educational and organisational, systemic, perspectives.



Dr. Beelen is also a Visiting Professor at Coventry University and a senior trainer for the European Association for International Education (EAIE). From that association he was the recipient of the 2018 President's Award for his contribution to internationalisation at home.

---

<sup>1</sup> Video edited by Mehtab Chahal

### Transcription of the Video Interview

**Ed Review:** *My name is Dr. Laura Baumvol and I am here interviewing Dr. Jos Beelen: professor of global learning at The Hague University of Applied Sciences and a prominent researcher in the field of International Education. This interview is about the development and future directions of internationalization at home around the globe the first question I am going to ask Dr. Beelen is: What are some of the highlights of your career in the field of international education over the last decades?*

**Dr. Beelen:** I have known several shifts in my career. My original background is in classical Archaeology and I started out teaching that. Then I became a policy adviser for internationalization at the head of an international office and I started to realize that whatever we tried to send our students abroad, our efforts remained limited to just a few percent. So that's where I became interested in internationalization at home. Then I moved on to become a researcher and a professor, which is my current job. And I think one of the highlights in my career has been to receive the award by the President of the European Association for international education for my contribution to internationalisation at home, so that really led me to believe that I made some contribution to the field.

**Ed Review:** *What are your research topics as a professor of Global Learning at The Hague University of Applied Sciences?*

**Dr. Beelen:** As a professor of Global Learning at The Hague University of Applied Sciences I lead a research group and maybe I should tell you how that works in a Dutch University of Applied Sciences, that is predominantly focused on teaching and not on research. But since about 20 years we have research groups consisting of lecturers that are part-time researchers. For example, two to three days a week and the idea of that system is that these lecturers bring the outcomes of their research back into their departments, back into teaching practice. And some of the topics that we research in my research group, the continuous pathway for internationalization, which is based on advice by the Education Council of the Netherlands, to consider internationalization a continued from the beginning of primary education all the way up to the end of tertiary education. And what we are interested in finding out is how we can make that a meaningful pathway and where the connections are between the different phases that students engage with internationalization in and also with intercultural communication, because our experience until now is that we start from zero, when students enter higher education, we tend to not talk about what they have already learned although we know that in the Netherlands secondary schools are very active in the field of internationalization. A second topic that we research is the implementation of internationalization at home or, in other words, the internationalization of teaching and learning and we look at that as an educational process, so what does it mean to make that a reality in teaching learning and assessment. But we also look at it from the perspective of a systemic issue, how does the university organization deal with it, which stakeholders are there, which are their roles and, of course, ultimately, how can we make those roles and that engagement more effective. And a third topic is the skills of lecturers to

facilitate internationalized learning. We know that across the world that is one of the major obstacles in internationalization: the lack of engagement and the lack of skills of academics. And one of the ways in which we research is through action research bringing the discussion on internationalization into the individual programs of study and they're together with lecturers research what is specifically relevant internationalization for that context, so make it context specific. A lot of our research is therefore qualitative.

***Ed Review:** Which issues have you dedicated yourself to and what is your role in the European Association of International Education?*

**Dr. Beelen:** I've been involved with the European Association for International Education for about 15 years. First in the expert community internationalization at home, which I was a member and then the chair. That's been going on for about 15 years. Then a long-barrel along with that I was a trainer we noticed that international officers needed skills and approaches to kick-start internationalization at home. And let me say that I do not consider internationalization at home the responsibility of the international office. Internationalization at home is about teaching and learning and I think therefore cannot be the responsibility of the international office but it should be that of departments and programs of study. But still international officers, because there is the word international in internationalization at home, find the issue of internationalization at home on their desks and how should they react to this, where are the limits of their responsibilities, and how can they work with other stakeholders to kick-start the process. Those are issues that we looked at in those training courses, which in a different shape continue up until today.

***Ed Review:** Please provide us with a historical background of Internationalization at Home in Europe.*

**Dr. Beelen:** Internationalisation at home started in 1999, when Bengt Nilsson, also called the father of internationalization at home, moved from the University of Lund in Sweden to the University of Applied Sciences in Malmö, which is barely 20 kilometres further on, but was a very different world, because Bengt Nilsson could not send his students abroad just like he was used to, because the new University didn't have international partners. So he had to start looking for international and intercultural learning experiences within the city of Malmö and he called that internationalization at home. And internationalization at home had the potential to reach beyond this small percentage, the small minority of mobile students. So this really resonated with many others in Europe who also recognized that their big efforts to internationalize really resulted in very small effects on this minority of students. So universities outside Sweden also engaged with the internationalization at home: Finland, Norway, the Netherlands, and Flanders. Flanders is the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, the northern part. And what these countries in this one region have in common is that they have relatively small populations with small languages and are therefore stimulated to look across borders. What we also saw was that the larger countries with the larger languages were much slower to follow and that is, to some extent, still the case although now we see for example in Germany and in Austria that they are quickly

making up in this and we see initiatives for internationalization at home developing. The same is true for Central and Eastern Europe. That was initially not part of this internationalization at-home movement but is now also starting to work on this.

***Ed Review:** From your point of view, what are some key concepts in relation to internationalization at home? You might be familiar with the discussion about the similarities and differences for between internationalization at home and internationalization of the curriculum.*

**Dr. Beelen:** We used to focus on those discussions, but not so much nowadays, because we recognize that internationalization at home and internationalization of the curriculum are, to a large extent, overlapping. What they aim for is to make internationalization benefit all students in a planned way, in a purposeful way, and to move beyond the mobile minority. So, there is a large overlap and you might also find the two terms, internationalization at home and internationalization of the curriculum, within the same document. As far as comprehensive internationalization is concerned, internationalization of teaching and learning is of course just a component of that, but a very important one and maybe the most important one. And then I may quote John Hudson who coined the comprehensive internationalization by saying that comprehensive internationalization starts with the curriculum.

***Ed Review:** What is the importance of Internationalization at Home in international education?*

**Dr. Beelen:** For me, the importance of internationalization at home is that it has the potential to reach all students. And we should consider internationalisation and internationalisation at home as tools to make students achieve their skills and their competencies that they need to function in a globalized world as professionals and as citizens. That means that internationalization at home or internationalization, for that matter, are not aims in itself, but they are tools towards better transversal skills, employability skills, *et cetera*. There is also the aspect that goes beyond professional skills or competencies and that is that internationalization, internationalization at home also contributes to global citizenship.

***Ed Review:** What's the rationale behind the updated definition of Internationalization at Home that you developed along with Dr. Jones in 2015?*

**Dr. Beelen:** The reason that Elspeth Jones and I wrote up this definition of internationalization at home in 2015, was that we thought the original definition of internationalization at home, which was something like anything except outgoing mobility, was not very helpful because it was more about what internationalization at home was not then about what it was. So although we knew that it is not a good idea to add yet more definitions to the field, we felt that a bit more extensive definition could be helpful and what we wanted to stress in that definition was, first of all, the integration of internationalization in the curriculum, so stress that it is not a separate or added-on module but it is really integrated into teaching and learning. We wanted to stress the aspect of purposeful and, for us, that means ultimately that international and intercultural perspectives are embedded in learning outcomes and therefore, if everything is okay, also in assessment. So that

purposeful character that moves beyond activities is quite important because it stresses that we need to look at outcomes first and then design our activities on the basis of that. And the third aspect that we wanted to stress was the focus on all students.

**Ed Review:** *What's the current status of Internationalization at Home in different regions of the world? For instance, in the Global North versus the Global South or in North America versus Europe?*

**Dr. Beelen:** We currently see that internationalization at home is on the move, it is very much a context specific topic. And by that I mean that it is specific to disciplines, so internationalization at home in a teacher education program is very different from internationalization of an engineering program. So it is very much dependent on the academic discipline, but it is also very much dependent on the region of the world that you were in. To a large extent, internationalization at home, internationalization of the curriculum are global developments, but they are very specific to regions as well. So, for example, in Latin America where mobility is limited because of socio-economic reasons, there is a lot of engagement with foreign languages. We see internationalisation at home developing in South Africa and one of the key aspects there is that, in order to collaborate with European universities, many universities are looking at online collaboration between South African and European students. Internationalization at home is not so much seen in Asia yet and maybe we will never see it there because it is perceived to be a Western concept that may be less applicable in non-Western contexts.

**Ed Review:** *How do you see the future development of Internationalization at Home?*

**Dr. Beelen:** The future of development of internationalization at home, I think, is dynamic. If you look at the discussions, for example, in university world news, we now see that the effects of student mobility are being discussed in terms of footprint. So you now see these calculations about what student mobility across the globe contributes to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. And it may be that if in the future there will be limits on mobility, internationalization at home becomes more important. You can also argue that there is an importance for internationalization at home when for other reasons mobility is limited, for example, through geopolitical reasons, and then we can still internationalize by online collaboration. That's why, I think, collaborative online internationalization, learning virtual mobility, and there are, there's a range of different terms, will play an increasing role in profiling internationalization at home.

**Ed Review:** *Finally, what is your future research agenda?*

**Dr. Beelen:** The future research agenda, that my group will work on, is further insights into how we can build on what students have already learned, formally and informally, when they enter university, learning experience with an international in an intercultural character that they already had. My university, The Hague University of Applied Sciences, is the most diverse University in the Netherlands, so we have a wealth of backgrounds among our walls, which we can benefit from. And building on those experiences is one of the things that we want to do better and we want to understand better. A next topic is the role of educational developers in

internationalization of the curriculum. So, we've seen a shift over the past years, of internationalization being about mobility and being considered the property of the international office, to internationalization increasingly being internationalization of the curriculum that should be owned by academics. And now we need to think about how we can systemically and sustainably support academics in becoming the owners of internationalized teaching and learning and therefore educational developers, meaning the people who are specialized in designing curricula, in writing learning outcomes, in designing assessments, should be more involved to work on this together with academics. But, then, educational developers in many cases have come in through the educational door and have not been engaged with internationalization so much. So what can we do to make their contribution to internationalization possible? And finally, that's a new term, at least I don't know if it is something new but it is a new term is the decolonization of the curriculum, which is quite big in Western Europe now. I think that decolonization of the curriculum is about looking at the curriculum from different perspectives and that tunes in very well with what we were doing already because you can argue that internationalized education is about bringing in different perspectives on your local reality, showing that the way you do it locally is not the only way to do it. So we will look at what decolonization means for us and how we can make it merge with internationalization of the curriculum, as we were already practicing that whether there are similarities or differences. And I think this research agenda will keep us busy for a number of years to come.

***Ed Review:** Thank you very much Dr. Beelen for your insights on topics of International Education. I am sure the audience has appreciated this interview.*