

AUTHOR:

Prof Jos Beelen¹ 

AFFILIATION:

¹The Hague University of Applied SciencesDOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.38140/pie.v40i4.7004>

e-ISSN 2519-593X

Perspectives in Education

2022 40(4): 325-327

PUBLISHED:

23 December 2022

RECEIVED:

25 July 2022

ACCEPTED:

19 November 2022



Published by the UFS

<http://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/pie>© Creative Commons
With Attribution (CC-BY)

Why we should continue to ask critical questions about internationalisation at home

Long before the COVID pandemic, we had already realised that traditional forms of internationalisation had their limitations. Mobility of students had remained limited to a small minority of students, a 'cultural elite'. We had also become aware that student mobility was mostly from the global north to the south and that some of its effects were unwanted, and could lead to 'white saviourism'. Finally, before the COVID pandemic we were already discussing the CO₂ imprint of mobility and considering 'greener' forms of mobility of students and staff.

More than twenty years ago, around 2000, attempts had already emerged to bring the benefits of internationalisation to all students through internationalisation at home. At the time, this was defined as "Any internationally related activity with the exception of outbound student and staff mobility"¹. This definition did not mention explicitly that all students were targeted and also omitted the purpose of these activities.

1. The easy popularity of internationalisation at home

While internationalisation at home - and the related concept of internationalisation of the curriculum - made their way into the policies of many universities, mobility of students remained the key focus. European countries such as Sweden, Norway and The Netherlands continue to prioritise student mobility in their higher education policies.

At the same time, implementation of internationalisation at home was impeded by a lack of strategies to develop internationalised curricula within disciplines and by the lack of support of academics in internationalising learning outcomes. Confusion about terminology and concepts continued to cripple the discussion about internationalisation and the continuous coining of presumably new 'concepts', such as 'intelligent internationalisation', 'resilient internationalisation, or 'deep internationalisation' only served to add to the 'terminological fog'.

¹ Crowther, P., et al. (2001) *Internationalisation at home: A position paper*. European Association for International Education

In order to stress the importance of outcomes versus activities and reaching all students versus a small section, Elspeth Jones and I in 2015² redefined internationalisation at home as “the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students, within domestic learning environments”. The key words in this definition are ‘purposeful’ and ‘all students’ and these key words should be kept in mind when looking at initiatives that claim that they can be labelled as ‘internationalisation at home’.

2. Internationalisation during the COVID pandemic

During the pandemic, internationalisation at home started to receive more attention, but misconceptions continued. Foremost among these is the notion that internationalisation at home is an alternative for those students unfortunate enough not to be able to enjoy the benefits of international mobility. This is an estimated 80-95% of students and it is therefore remarkable to consider mobility of a small minority of students as the norm and an internationalised home curriculum for nearly all students as an alternative.

An example is a report by Universities UK International, published in the summer of 2021. The report is titled *Internationalisation at home – Developing global citizens without travel; international activities delivered at home: showcasing impactful programmes, benefits and good practice*³.

The report contains examples from three Anglophone countries: the UK, the US and Australia. It presents examples of initiatives of Virtual Exchange as an alternative to student mobility. These are electives and therefore fall short of one of the key characteristics of internationalisation at home: that they are included in the core curriculum for all students.

Another issue is that global citizenship is mentioned in the report but not made explicit.

3. The potential of an internationalised curriculum

Internationalisation of home curricula serves as instrument to develop transversal skills of graduates for employment, such as complex problem solving, critical thinking and intercultural communication. This could be considered the ‘hard side’ of internationalisation of home curricula. But an internationalised curriculum should also contribute to the development of students’ awareness of societal issues and their skills to engage with these. In global citizenship education, the global dimension often dominates the local, national or regional (e.g. European or African) dimensions. A successful internationalised curriculum integrates how global, regional, national and local dimensions interact.

This dimension is represented in the current drive for International Higher Education for Society (IHES), the Sustainable Development goals and Education for Sustainable Development.

4. Internationalisation at home and inclusion

Internationalisation at home, with its focus on all students, has been considered an inclusive form of internationalisation. Yet it may not be as inclusive as it looks at first glance. Some students have a more international mindset than others, may have a benefit by being bicultural or may have engaged with internationalisation in secondary education.

² https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-20877-0_5

³ www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/universities-uk-international/insights-and-publications/uuki-publications/internationalisation-home-developing

Virtual Exchange, a key component of internationalisation at home, is also not inclusive by default. Not all students have equal access to connectivity and devices. There are various other exclusion mechanisms that can play a role in on-line collaboration, such as pedagogies and assessment that favour some students over others. Proficiency in foreign language is also an aspect that can generate inequalities. Many of these aspects we know from physical international classrooms, but we need yet to find out more about how processes of inclusion and exclusion work in virtual settings.

5. Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL)

Virtual Exchange and particularly its most intensive form: Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) can provide unique opportunities for authentic learning with others around the globe. However, it is not the only instrument in the toolbox of internationalisation at home. Local engagement with cultural diversity and interdisciplinary work are just as important and should complement on-line practices.

This requires thinking about the 'purposeful' aspect of Virtual Exchange which implies that teaching and learning should be outcomes oriented and not just activity based. It means that there are learning outcomes, assessment and reflection of the learning process by students and that there is alignment across a programme of studies. Interdisciplinary work, for example can be done both 'at home' and on-line and it is good to determine how each of these activities contribute to an internationalised curriculum.

The 'purposeful' also relates to the skills of academics to design Virtual Exchange together with a partner abroad. In the scramble to switch from physical to virtual mobility, many Virtual Exchange practices remain activity or experience oriented with academics indicating that they need support in design and delivery of Virtual Exchange. In 2021, a step forward was the condition that an educational developer or advisor is involved in grants for Virtual Exchange that the Dutch Ministry of Education made available to individual lecturers. Internationalisation at home puts a strong focus on reaching all students. However, many practices in Virtual Exchange still tend to be electives for a limited group of students. Indeed, 'upscaling' such practices to include all students requires considerable effort.

6. Questions about purpose

The drive to make internationalisation purposeful is why we should continue to ask critical questions about internationalisation at home. The current initiative for critical internationalisation⁴ represents a meaningful platform for the discussion of such questions. Such a platform is much needed in a situation in which many universities seem unable to move beyond the original definition of internationalisation at home from 2001 and continue to focus on just components of internationalisation at home such as integrating international students into the receiving university or preparing students for mobility. Unless we overcome these mobility related notions of internationalisation, we will not be able to move forward to meaningful development of education for sustainable development for all students, embedded in learning outcomes and therefore purposeful.

Jos Beelen is Professor of Global Learning at The Hague University of Applied Sciences, The Netherlands and Visiting Professor at the Centre for Global Learning at Coventry University, United Kingdom

⁴ <https://criticalinternationalization.net>