HOW TO IMPLEMENT INTERNATIONALISATION AT HOME

An interview with Dr. Jos Beelen
We asked Dr. BeeLEN about what internationalisation at home (IAH) is, characteristics of this process and the obstacles to implementing IAH at higher education institutions (HEIs).
Q. COULD YOU EXPLAIN TO US WHAT INTERNATIONALISATION AT HOME (IAH) IS?

A. DR. ELSPETH JONES AND I HAVE COME UP WITH A NEW DEFINITION OF IAH THREE YEARS AGO AS THE PURPOSEFUL INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONAL AND INTERCULTURAL DIMENSIONS INTO THE FORMAL AND INFORMAL CURRICULUM FOR ALL STUDENTS WITHIN DOMESTIC LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS. TWO WORDS IN THIS DEFINITION ARE PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT: PURPOSEFUL AND ALL. THE FIRST IS THE WORD "PURPOSEFUL" MEANING THAT WE ARE MOVING IN INTERNATIONALISATION FROM INPUT TO OUTCOMES SO WE HAVE A PARTICULAR AIM IN MIND. IT’S NOT OK TO JUST DO SOME ACTIVITIES OF IAH, BUT THOSE ACTIVITIES HAVE A PURPOSE. INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONAL AND INTERCULTURAL MEANS THAT THE INTERNATIONAL IS NOT SEPARATE BUT IT IS PART OF THE REGULAR TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE FORMAL AND THE INFORMAL CURRICULUM - THE FORMAL CURRICULUM MEANING WHERE STUDENTS GET THEIR CREDITS AND THE INFORMAL CURRICULUM IS CAMPUS LIFE, WHAT HAPPENS IN THE CORRIDORS, AROUND THE UNIVERSITY BUT ALSO IN THE CITY THAT THE UNIVERSITY IS IN AND THE DOMESTIC LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS BECAUSE THAT PROVIDES US (PARTICULARLY WHEN YOU ARE IN A CITY WITH A DIVERSE POPULATION AND MANY CULTURES) WITH THE OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN THINGS AT HOME THAT OTHER STUDENTS WILL TRAVEL ABROAD FOR. SO IF YOU LOOK AT THOSE TWO WORDS “PURPOSEFUL AND ALL” THEN YOU CAPTURE INTERNATIONALISATION AT HOME. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT SMALL INITIATIVES FOR A SMALL GROUP OF STUDENTS OR EXPERIMENTS DON’T HAVE ANY VALUE. THESE CAN CERTAINLY HELP TO BUILD EXPERIENCE. FOR EXAMPLE ONLINE COLLABORATION, YOU MAY NOT DO THAT ON A HUGE SCALE AT THE START, BUT IF YOU FEEL THAT IT IS GOOD THAT STUDENTS LEARN CERTAIN SKILLS THEN YOU MIGHT WANT TO UPSCALE AND MAKE THAT AN ACTIVITY FOR ALL STUDENTS. AND THAT IS THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE.
Q. WHY HAS IAH BECOME AN IMPORTANT ACTIVITY FOR HEIS AROUND THE WORLD?

A. WE’VE BEEN TAKING ABOUT IAH FOR MORE THAN 15 YEARS NOW. THE REASON WE STARTED TALKING ABOUT IAH WAS THAT, AND THIS IS NOT ONLY IN EUROPE, WE STARTED TO REALIZE THAT INTERNATIONALISATION IS MORE THAN MOBILITY, IT IS MORE THAN TRAVELING, AND PEOPLE STARTED TO ASK THE QUESTION: WELL IF WE ARE ABLE TO SEND MAYBE 5% OR 10% OF OUR STUDENTS ABROAD, WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER 95%, OR 90%, OR 85%... DON’T THEY NEED INTERNATIONALISATION AS WELL? IN THE NETHERLANDS WE JUST SAW NEW FIGURES BEING PUBLISHED AND THE MOBILITY OF STUDENTS NOW STANDS AT 22%, SO AFTER 40 OR 50 YEARS TRYING TO STIMULATE STUDENT MOBILITY WE STILL SEEM NOT TO BE ABLE TO GET BEYOND THOSE 20, 22, 25% ON AVERAGE. THE MAIN REASON WHY WE SEND OUR STUDENTS ABROAD, AND THIS COMES OUT OF THE ERASMUS IMPACT STUDY, IS THAT THEY LEARN THE SO CALLED “TRANSVERSAL SKILLS”. A FEW OF THESE SKILLS ARE CURIOSITY, PROBLEM SOLVING, TOLERANCE, EMPATHY, AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS. IT IS A VERY LONG LIST OF TRANSVERSAL SKILLS AND THEY ARE ALSO CALLED EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS, 21ST CENTURY SKILLS, OR SOFT SKILLS. WE KNOW THAT MOST EMPLOYERS ATTACH GREAT VALUE TO THOSE SKILLS, SO THEY DO SEE THAT STUDENTS ABROAD HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN THOSE SKILLS. SO IF WE TALK ABOUT IAH, WE SHOULD SAY THAT IT IS A TOOL THAT ENABLES ALL STUDENTS TO GET THOSE TRANSVERSAL SKILLS AS WELL. NOW THAT WE KNOW THAT ONLY A SMALL MINORITY OF STUDENTS GET THOSE SKILLS ABROAD, WE SHOULD LOOK AT OUR CURRICULA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF OUR STUDENTS BEING ABLE TO LEARN THESE AT HOME BECAUSE I THINK EVERYONE WILL AGREE THAT THOSE SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT FOR ALL STUDENTS. WE CANNOT BE SATISFIED BY SAYING WE ONLY GIVE 10% OF OUR STUDENTS THESE SKILLS.
Q. COULD YOU MENTION THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS THAT DEFINE IAH?

A. I AM GOING TO LOOK AT A FEW CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERNATIONALISATION AT HOME:

1) IAH IS A TOOL NOT AN AIM IN ITSELF, JUST LIKE INTERNATIONALISATION IN GENERAL IS NOT AN AIM AND HELPS US TO ACHIEVE GOALS.
2) IAH IS DIFFERENT IN EVERY DISCIPLINE AND EVERY PROGRAMME. INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS, NURSING, AND ENGINEERING WOULD HAVE VERY DIFFERENT INTERNATIONAL PROFILES AND WOULD ALSO EXPECT DIFFERENT THINGS FROM THEIR GRADUATES. SO, YOU INVENT THE INTERNATIONALISATION, YOU INVENT THE WHEEL IN EVERY PROGRAM. WE ALSO KNOW THAT DISCIPLINES HAVE A VERY DIFFERENT REACTION TO INTERNATIONALISATION AND TO TEACHING AND LEARNING.
3) IAH ENGAGES WITH LOCAL INTERNATIONAL AND CULTURAL PRACTICES. LIKE I SAID BEFORE IN MORE DIVERSE CITIES THERE ARE MORE OF THESE AVAILABLE, BUT THERE ARE MANY CULTURAL GROUPS AND INTERNATIONAL COMPANIES THAT MIGHT HELP YOU TO INTERNATIONALIZE YOUR CURRICULUM.
4) IAH IS PART OF THE COMPELUSORY CURRICULUM SO THAT ALL STUDENTS GET AN INTERNATIONAL OR INTERNATIONALISATION EXPERIENCE.
5) IAH IS FOCUSED ON OUTCOMES, NOT ON INPUT.

(SEE NEXT SHEET)
6) IAH does not depend on incoming students or teaching in English. You can have international and intercultural perspectives if you teach in your local language. If you change to English because you have international students coming in then you have far more opportunities, but we also know that just by bringing in international students does not mean that home students and international students learn from each other. In IAH, we think of our home students first and incoming international students are a way, a tool if I can use that word, to internationalize teaching and learning for the home students and not the other way around.

7) IAH considers mobility a “plus” option. Of course, we want as many students as we can to be mobile but we consider mobility a plus option meaning that the curriculum is for all students and on top of that some students may want to go abroad.

8) Finally, IAH should be owned by academics because if we talk about the integration of internationalisation in teaching and learning in a specific program, then only the academics can do that. So the academics have become very important in internationalisation at home. They are the key players.
Q. COULD YOU TELL US ABOUT SOME COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS OF IAH?

A. THERE ARE SEVEN COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS OF IAH:

1) IAH MEANS TEACHING IN ENGLISH. YOU MAY HEAR THIS AROUND YOU POSSIBLY.
2) INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ARE NEEDED TO INTERNATIONALIZE TEACHING AND LEARNING. WE KNOW THAT EVEN IF YOU USE BOOKS IN THE LOCAL LANGUAGE, BOOKS FROM THE US FOR EXAMPLE TRANSLATED INTO YOUR LOCAL LANGUAGE, THEY STILL HAVE THEIR US PERSPECTIVE, SO YOU DO NOT NECESSARILY NEED TO CHANGE YOUR ENTIRE CURRICULUM TO ENGLISH OR PARTS OF IT. WE ALSO HAVE EXAMPLES OF PROGRAMS DELIVERED IN ENGLISH THAT ARE NOT VERY INTERNATIONAL AT ALL, THAT THEY ARE JUST LOCAL PROGRAMS TRANSLATED IN ENGLISH.
3) IAH IS A “SECOND BEST” OPTION FOR NON-MOBILE STUDENTS. SO, IF YOU ARE SO UNFORTUNATE THAT YOU CANNOT GO ABROAD, YOU CAN DO AN INTERNATIONAL SEMESTER AT HOME BUT THIS LIMITS THE INTERNATIONALISATION TO ONE SEMESTER. WHY NOT USE THE ENTIRE CURRICULUM, THE ENTIRE THREE OR FOUR YEARS?
4) IAH SERVES TO PREPARE STUDENTS FOR MOBILITY. WELL IT CAN, IT CAN ENCOURAGE STUDENTS BUT IT NOT THE ONLY THING THAT IAH IS FOR.
5) THE MAIN PURPOSE OF IAH IS TO ACCOMMODATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS. THIS IS NOT TRUE. IT IS ABOUT YOUR OWN STUDENTS.
6) OFFERING INTERNATIONALISATION ELECTIVES FOR A MINORITY OF STUDENTS EQUALS IAH.
7) IAH IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE INTERNATIONAL OFFICE. I THINK IT IS NOT. IAH IS ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING SO THE PROGRAMS ARE RESPONSIBLE. BECAUSE THE WORD INTERNATIONAL IS IN “INTERNATIONAL OFFICE”, IAH ENDS IN AN INTERNATIONAL OFFICE DESK. I THINK THAT IT IS NOT WHERE IT SHOULD BE. I THINK IT SHOULD BE WITH THE PROGRAMS, BUT THE INTERNATIONAL OFFICE WILL HAVE A VERY IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE SUPPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION.
Q. HOW COULD YOU DESCRIBE THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF IAH?

A. WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF IAH IS THAT IT COMES IN THREE TYPES:
THE FIRST IS IMPLEMENTATION BY “ADD ON” MEANING THAT AN INTERNATIONAL MODULE IS ADDED TO THE CURRICULUM BUT THERE IS NO CONNECTION WITH THE REST OF THE CURRICULUM. THIS IS THE EASIEST WAY AND DEFINITELY NOT THE BEST BECAUSE YOU ADD SOMETHING THAT IS DETACHED FROM THE REST OF THE CURRICULUM.
THE SECOND WAY IS IMPLEMENTATION “BY INFUSION” AND THAT MEANS THAT OFTEN MANY PEOPLE, LECTURERS AND OTHERS ARE VERY ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT IAH AND THEY START ADDING ALL KINDS OF ACTIVITIES, BUT WE DON’T KNOW WHAT THESE ACTIVITIES ARE FOR. SO THE AIM HAS NOT BEEN DETERMINED BEFOREHAND.
THE THIRD WAY IS THE BEST AND THE MOST DIFFICULT AND IT IS IMPLEMENTATION “BY TRANSFORMATION” MEANING THAT YOU BUILD THE INTERNATIONAL AND THE INTERCULTURAL INTO THE EXISTING CURRICULUM. AN INTERNATIONALIZED CURRICULUM MEANS THAT YOU ALREADY HAVE A CURRICULUM THAT YOU MAKE MORE INTERNATIONAL. HERE WE TALK ABOUT INTERNATIONALIZING THE CURRICULUM AND INTERNATIONALIZING LEARNING OUTCOMES.
Q. WHO ARE THE KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN IAH?

A. IF WE LOOK AT THE STAKEHOLDERS IN IMPLEMENTING INTERNATIONALISATION AT HOME, THE ACADEMICS ARE IN THE CENTER AND AROUND THEM THERE ARE ALL KINDS OF STAKEHOLDERS, OUTSIDE THE UNIVERSITY, INSIDE THE UNIVERSITY, AND THEY ALL HAVE AN INTEREST IN GOOD EDUCATION. I THINK THAT TWO MAIN STAKEHOLDERS ARE INTERNATIONAL OFFICERS WITH THE KNOWLEDGE ON INTERNATIONALISATION, BUT ALSO EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPERS AND EDUCATIONAL SPECIALISTS. THEY HAVE OFTEN NOT BEEN INVOLVED IN INTERNATIONALISATION BECAUSE THEY WERE CONSIDERED TO BE WORKING ON EDUCATION WHILE OTHERS WERE WORKING ON INTERNATIONALISATION. BUT WE ARE NOW TALKING ABOUT THE INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONALISATION AND EDUCATION, SO WE NEED THE EXPERTISE FROM THOSE TWO. WORKING WITH EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPERS, INVOLVING THEM IN THE DISCUSSION, TRAINING THEM FOR EXAMPLE FOR INTERNATIONALISING LEARNING OUTCOMES IS QUITE AN IMPORTANT STEP TO TAKE. IT IS ALSO AN IMPORTANT STEP TO ASK EMPLOYERS, ALUMNI, AND STUDENTS WHAT THEY THINK INTERNATIONALISATION SHOULD BE LIKE IN THEIR PROGRAMS BASED ON THEIR EXPERIENCE.
Q. FINALLY, WHAT WOULD BE THE MAIN OBSTACLES TO IMPLEMENTING IAH?

A. ONE OF THE KEY OBSTACLES IS THE LIMITED EXPERIENCE OF FACULTY AND STAFF IN INTERNATIONALISING THE CURRICULUM. THIS IS NOT A BIG SURPRISE BECAUSE IN MANY CASES ACADEMICS HAVE NOT BEEN PREPARED FOR INTERNATIONALISING THE CURRICULUM. WHAT IS STRANGE IS THAT WHEN UNIVERSITIES SAY THIS, THAT ACADEMICS DON’T KNOW HOW TO DO IT, THEY DON’T PROVIDE MORE TRAINING AND WE HARDLY SEE ANY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OR TRAINING FOR IAH, AND HERE IS WHERE INTERNATIONAL OFFICERS COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE BECAUSE IF THEY TAKE THE INITIATIVE FOR SUCH TRAINING THEY MAY GIVE AN IMPORTANT BOOST TO IAH AT THEIR UNIVERSITIES.
ANOTHER KEY OBSTACLE IS THE LACK OF STRATEGIES FOR IAH IMPLEMENTATION. IAH MAY BE EXCEPTIONAL IN THAT IT RELIES LESS ON TOP DOWN POLICIES THAN ON BOTTOM UP DEVELOPMENT. WHILE INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES MAY SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF IAH, THE DISCIPLINE AND THE CONTEXT OF INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMMES OF STUDY REALLY DETERMINE THEIR INTERNATIONAL AND INTERCULTURAL DIMENSIONS. TOP DOWN POLICIES DO NOT GUARANTEE THAT IMPLEMENTATION TAKES PLACE IN PROGRAMMES OF STUDY. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE ABSENCE OF TOP DOWN STRATEGIES HAS NOT PREVENTED PROGRAMMES OF STUDY TO DEVELOP INITIATIVES FOR IAH. AT PROGRAMME LEVEL, MANY ACTIVITIES COULD BE IDENTIFIED, OFTEN WITHOUT THE CENTRAL LEVEL OF THE UNIVERSITY BEING AWARE OF THEM. HOWEVER, IT IS NOT CLEAR TO WHAT EXTENT THESE ACTIVITIES HAVE BEEN PLANNED PURPOSEFULLY, ARE ASSESSED AND REACH ALL STUDENTS.
ANOTHER OBstacle IS THE Lack Of CONNECTION BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS. IAH Has CONTRIBUTED To THE SHIFT IN FOCUS FROM MOBILITY To THE HOME CURRICULUM. THIS Has STARTED TO CHALLENGE THE Way IN WHICH INTERNATIONALISATION IS ORGANISEd And SUPPORTed IN UNIVERSITIES. WHEN INTERNATIONALISATION WAS MAINLY UNDERSTOOD AS MOBILITY, IT WAS LOGICAL FOR INTERNATIONAL OFFICES TO TAKE THE LEAD. NOW THAT THE CURRICULUM IS TAKING CENTRE-STATE, ACADEMICS, AS THE MAIN ACTORS IN INTERNATIONALISATION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING, HAVE BECOME KEY PLAYERS. THIS IMPLIES THAT THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL OFFICES CHANGES. THEY WILL CONTINUE TO MANAGE MOBILITY, AS AN IMPORTANT COMPLEMENT TO IAH. HOWEVER, SUCCESSFUL INTERNATIONALISATION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING WILL REQUIRE THE INVOLVEMENT OF EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPERS, QUALITY ASSURANCE OFFICERS AND OTHER SPECIALISTS IN EDUCATION. THESE HAVE UNTIL NOW MOSTLY BEEN OUTSIDERS IN INTERNATIONALISATION. INVOLVING THEM IN THE INTERNATIONALISATION PROCESS REQUIRES TARGETED ACTION BY LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF UNIVERSITIES.
let's change
YOU. US. THE WORLD.