



The Global Learning Podcast Episode 3:

Global Learning in Research

with Dr. Robert Coelen

Meet Dr. Robert Coelen:



Robert John Coelen is Professor of Internationalisation of Higher Education (IoHE) at Stenden University of Applied Sciences. He grew up in the Netherlands and undertook his higher education in Australia. He gained a B.Sc.(Hons) and an M.Sc. from La Trobe University, Australia, and his Ph.D. at The University of Western Australia. Coelen founded Euroscholars, an organisation of LERU universities that aims to give North American undergraduate students a research experience in Europe. He was also the Chairman of the Leiden University Global Ranking Symposia and a member of the Executive Board of the EAIE. His experience in IoHE stems from executive roles at four universities in Australia and the Netherlands and presently in his role as an academic. He is a member of the Editorial Board of the Journal of Studies in International Education and reviews papers for the Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education and his research interests are in Internationalisation of Education. Presently he is, as Founding Director, creating the [Centre for Internationalisation of Education](#), a collaborative project of his university together with the University of Groningen. He is also a Visiting Professor at Tongji University, Shanghai, China, in the area of international education management.

Episode Transcript:

Welcome to the Global Learning Podcast. Today's podcast supports Global Learning in the Research Environment: Making the Most of Collaboration to Generate Innovation. This is the fifth session in the second series of NAFSA's Architecture for Global Learning, an online professional enrichment series helping faculty, scholars, and administrators strengthen their understanding of global learning and develop capacity for translating mission-driven institutional global learning goals into concrete and co-curricular experiences.

Join us March 7 from 2:00-3:00 PM EST for the Architecture for Global Learning series session [Global Learning in the Research Environment](#).

Robert John Coelen is Professor of Internationalisation of Higher Education (IoHE) at Stenden University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands. He is also Founding Director, of the [Centre for Internationalisation of Education](#), a collaborative project of his university together with the University of Groningen. He is also a Visiting Professor at Tongji University, Shanghai, China, in the area of international education management.

Dr. Coelen, thank you for joining us, my first question is:

1. You are the Director of the newly established Centre for Internationalisation of Education in the Netherlands; what led to the development of this center?

That's an interesting question and to answer it, I need to start with my introduction into the field of internationalization of education in Australia. I lived for 30 years in Australia and spent most of my time being a researcher in the natural sciences. At one point I was asked whether I would mind representing my university in the international arena. I did and achieved the aims that were set for this mission. After that the senior management of my university asked whether I would create an international office for the university. This was more than 20 years ago. Whilst I missed the excitement of research from time to time, working on aspects of university life that impacted on the transformation of young people, was equally exciting.

Nevertheless, all the way through my senior executive roles at 4 universities, 2 in Australia and 2 in the Netherlands, I kept asking myself questions about the interventions we were designing under the umbrella of internationalization of education (and actually I'll refer to it as International Education). Were these the most effective? How did they work, and how could they be developed further? What was the future for this? I sought answers for these questions, but all too often, after consulting the literature, I came away feeling that there was no clear answer, or much more research was needed to satisfy rightly critical colleagues that the interventions bundled under the umbrella of international education were doing what they were supposed to. Of course, more often than would be good, these interventions suffered from the pressure of disciplinary needs, or indeed academic unfamiliarity, and were not given the attention they needed.

The change that brought the Centre of Internationalisation of Education (<http://www.cie.frl>) to life was, as so often this is the case, a confluence of several important factors:

- a. The first was that the University of Groningen decided to establish a campus in the same city (Leeuwarden) as my own University (now known as NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences). One of the features of this campus was the focus on Global Responsibility and Leadership, aptly demonstrated by the range of Master's programs at this campus as well as its residential Bachelor Program of that name. The importance of this to International Education (IE) is that its activities have multidisciplinary characteristics and as such it is a natural partner for a campus that focuses on a multidisciplinary approach to global problems;

- b. Secondly, my urge to start solving some of the vexing questions in International Education was satisfied by my president allowing me to relinquish my executive duties and take up a research-focused role and he together with the Dean of the University of Groningen campus agreed to collaborate to set up this centre;
- c. A comparison of peer-reviewed publications that could be found with synonyms of internationalisation of education, or international education, over time, produced a graph that was not unlike that of articles on online education, something that before the 1990's was simply non-existent. This told me that International Education was in essence a young field and there was much to be done;
- d. Teaming up with Professor Adriaan Hofman allowed me to set up a solid PhD program, which incidentally in the Netherlands, as normal, has no coursework. The first call for interest led to 100 people letting me know that they were interested in doing a PhD. Well it wasn't hard to fathom that there was an urgent need felt by others out there that this field needed more research and was exciting. This led to the current first cohort of 9 PhD candidates, a highly selected group, ranging from Colombia, Costa Rica, USA, to the UK, Sweden, and the Netherlands.

2. How will the CIE address known and unknown gaps in the field of Internationalisation of Education?

It's interesting to note that most candidates need to commence their PhD projects by qualitative approaches to establish the factors that are subsequently used in quantitative approaches. This tells you something about the state of play in research in International Education. There is not much to bank on. When you ask yourself for example, which factors are important in determining the quality of implementation of internationalisation of education in a particular discipline, there is not a ready-made set of well-known factors that we can draw upon. Or when you ask the question which parameters are important in shaping the education of pre-service teachers to ensure that they become capable of embedding international education learning outcomes in primary school curricula, you end up in the same dead-end street. You cannot just pick up a list.

Part of the process to reduce the initial group of 100 interested in doing a PhD, was to require them to have at least 5 years of experience in International Education. This fact, together with a broad definition of the arena of research we would permit at the Centre of Internationalisation of Education, meant that the topics being addressed are borne out of professional practice and good academic curiosity. So, rather than choosing a particular part of International Education as the focus for CIE, I let professional practice be the parent of the research projects. This, I believe, ensures relevancy and will, by itself, shift focus as needs arise and as answers are found for the issues we address. The multidisciplinary nature of IE is already visible in the specializations of supervisors involved, ranging from education, to public administration, and psychology, to a background in internationalisation. And this is only just the beginning.

I felt the centre could do more than be a place to enjoy graduate education in IE; it should do its bit to bring together scholars in the field. Whilst there are plenty of journals carrying part of this task, the gap

between doing research and its publication is substantial. I know this from my role on the Editorial Board of the Journal of Studies in International Education; not only do we have a 85% or thereabouts rejection rate, there is a long lag time between when the work was carried out and when it appears in print. For an aspect for which virtually every university in the world is spending, or causing their students to spend, a great deal of effort, time, or money, we have no time to lose. Indeed, if we are to deliver young people to this planet who are going to be more capable than our generation to solve our most vexing global problems, we not only need to work fast, but also ensure we work efficiently and in the right direction. You'll realise from this statement that my passion for this topic stems from the belief that the learning outcomes of IE directly impinge on the capabilities that are needed to prosper in the 21st century.

This takes not only good research, but also knowing what is happening elsewhere, as, and when it happens. To this end, the center developed a web site which is being populated as we speak. It's capable of, quite literally, showing on a map of the globe, where graduate students are carrying out research projects on International Education. Any student anywhere in the world can, again quite literally, make their mark on the world, by describing their PhD or Master's by research project on this site, which is accessible via the website of CIE. In this way, I hope to help build knowledge about the global research community of International Education and in doing so enhance the efficiency of its own development. Other developments are planned for this web site that will pay in to this principle.

3. How would you characterize the connection between the concept of 'global learning' and the research and practice of internationalization of education? How do you envision this relationship could change based upon emerging work at the CIE?

Yeah I'm glad to see that the concept of global learning, if we can speak of one concept, is being promulgated by NAFSA, as important for our prosperity as a globe of nations, or may be better as a globe of multi-locals, as Taiye Selasi, would have it. The research and practice of internationalization of education will inform the concept. It will load the concept with empirical evidence so that our confidence in global learning, our need for it, and its outcomes will become more broadly accepted. In doing so, it may become an even more powerful force against xenophobic trends that are observable around the world. Emotions that arise out of fear need to be quelled with evidence. In a small way, I hope that the research conducted at CIE can contribute to our understanding of global learning and in doing so make the interventions that bring about this learning become better. Whilst one should never assume the work is done, it's good to think that a substantial body of research can shift our understanding in such a way as to allow us to pay more attention to other aspects of life and living for the betterment of this spaceship we all live on.

Thank you Dr. Coelen. This ends the Global Learning Podcast Episode 3 on Global Learning in Research. Again, join us online, March 7th from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. EST for the Architecture for Global Learning e-seminar, [Global Learning in the Research Environment](#).

For more information about NAFSA's global learning programs and professional enrichment opportunities visit: www.nafsa.org/globallearning. Thank you.