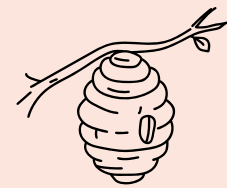


Like a honeycomb

Towards the structural embedment of knowledge by experience at the Department of Special Needs Education



OUR BEEHIVE

The Department of Special Needs Education at Ghent University conceptualizes experiential knowledge as a dynamic and evolving learning process, intricately embedded within various facets of both educational practice and research. This process can be compared to the structure of a honeycomb, where each small but significant contribution plays a crucial role in strengthening the collective. This network of experiential knowledge thrives not only through long-standing partnerships, as outlined in the accompanying legend, but also through adaptive, spontaneous collaborations—represented by the empty combs—that foster innovation and responsiveness. By embracing a broad spectrum of experiential knowledge, the department cultivates a learning environment that is both inclusive and transformative.



HOW CAN WE CREATE A WELL-FUNCTIONING BEEHIVE?

Building a thriving system requires a foundation of collaboration, openness and mutual respect—much like the structure of a honeycomb, where each cell contributes to the overall strength. Each participant's contribution, regardless of its size, is vital in producing the collective "honey"—insights, innovations and progress. However, challenges or "stings" must be addressed by eliminating barriers that hinder communication, trust or recognition. In doing so, we refine processes and enhance the environment's effectiveness and supportiveness. By fostering strong connections, encouraging critical reflection and ensuring that resources are accessible, we create a dynamic and inclusive space where ongoing growth and development can flourish, much like a well-functioning beehive operating in harmony.



SEKEHE
STRUCTURAL EMBEDDING OF
KNOWLEDGE BY EXPERIENCE
IN HIGHER EDUCATION



HONEY TO HARVEST

The strength of a well-functioning beehive lies in the insights, innovations and progress it generates. This is the honey to be harvested:

- Experiential knowledge...
 - ... disrupts established academic perspectives on what constitutes legitimate knowledge
 - ... strengthens connections between theoretical constructs and practical applications
 - ... plays a crucial role in identifying and addressing blind spots within our education system
 - ... enriches discussions with greater nuance, complexity and sensitivity
 - ... makes complex academic frameworks more accessible and relatable
- Experts by experience are acknowledged as legitimate professionals and students with experiential knowledge feel valued and respected.
- Leveraging experiential knowledge fosters networking and creates opportunities for all stakeholders.
- The integration of experiential knowledge encourages students and educators to reflect critically on their positions and assumptions.



STINGS TO REMOVE

A strong network cannot grow without challenges. These stings are obstacles that need to be removed:

- Universities reinforce a hierarchical "us vs. them" mentality, limiting collaboration and trust.
- Experts by experience lack recognition and status in academia and experiential knowledge is undervalued compared to traditional academic knowledge.
- Ethical concerns arise over ownership and protection of personal stories, risking a "human zoo" effect.
- No robust framework exists for integrating experiential knowledge sustainably and effectively.
- Insufficient time, resources and preparation hinder meaningful integration of experiential knowledge.
- Fragmented and inconsistent collaborations undermine stability and shared responsibility.
- Representation lacks nuance: one expert cannot represent an entire group.
- Misalignment exists between curricula and the needs, capacity, and preferences of experts by experience.
- Researchers, educators and students need deeper reflection on roles, narratives, and multipositionality in relation to experiential knowledge.

Like a honeycomb – Legend

Towards the structural embedment of knowledge by experience at the Department of Special Needs Education



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Prof. Eric Broekaert (1951–2016), head of the Department of Special Needs Education, promoted dialectical integration by synthesizing diverse paradigms, methods, and interventions. He later introduced postmodern and disability studies perspectives, emphasizing inclusion, diversity, self-advocacy, and empowerment.



In 1976, Prof. Eric Broekaert founded De Kiem, Belgium's first therapeutic community, offering residential and outpatient support for individuals struggling with drug, alcohol or medication-related issues and their families.



Prof. Geert Van Hove (°1957) has made significant contributions to Disability Studies at Ghent University and was a key advocate for inclusive education in Flanders. In 1997, he co-founded Onze Nieuwe Toekomst. He actively promoted deinstitutionalization and more person-centred support in care systems.



Onze Nieuwe Toekomst is a self-advocacy movement led by people with intellectual disabilities in Flanders. The movement fights for equal rights and personal ownership over choices and decisions. Embedded in the Department, Onze Nieuwe Toekomst enables close collaboration in research and education.



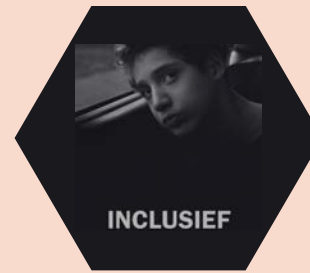
Villa Voortman, founded in 2010 in Ghent, is a low-threshold meeting place for people with a dual diagnosis of substance use and serious mental health challenges. From the start, the Department has collaborated closely with the initiative; every year, students participate in writing ateliers and other artistic projects, taking on co-creative roles.



Ouders voor Inclusie supports parents of children with specific needs in pursuing an inclusive life, offering coaching through the Steunpunt voor Inclusie. Embedded in the Department, the Steunpunt voor Inclusie enables close collaboration in research and education.



OC Nieuwe Vaart supports children and adolescents with emotional and behavioural disorders through special education and day treatment programs. In close collaboration with the Department, it offers internships, thesis support and joint training initiatives. Prof. Franky D'Oosterlinck, as both director of OC Nieuwe Vaart and guest professor at the Department, plays a key role in this partnership.



Inclusief follows four children with special educational needs in mainstream schools. Directed by Ellen Vermeulen, the film emerged from a research project on teacher professionalisation. It gives space to the voices of children and parents, through a co-creative process initiated by the Department.



As part of the Theoretical Orthopedagogics course, a yearly study week is organised to explore policy, service organisations, and current themes in special needs education. Students take part in visits and activities that deepen their understanding of the field. In 2023–2024, the central theme was 'Experience as a Compass'.



Dreaming Outside the Lines shares the stories of three young people with disabilities transitioning from school to inclusive life. Building on the doctoral research of Hanne Vandebussche, the project uses visual storytelling to highlight five key insights, including passion and talent, self-determination, and rethinking support.



This podcast by Ghent University's Human Rights Research Network explores complex human rights issues, amplifying voices of those affected alongside expert insights. Episode 4, featuring researcher Marjolein De Pau from the Department, delves into forensic commitment through personal stories from Ghent Prison.



Lode's Code is a hybrid animation-documentary that shows the relationship with Dr. Marieke Vandecasteele's (filmmaker, researcher at the Department of Special Needs Education) oldest brother Lode and her search into her own position within the family nest. Her leaving is the common thread.



In the book #ookwij, Brent, Lucas, and Sofie, in collaboration with the Department, collected fifteen testimonies from young adults with disabilities sharing their perspectives on inclusion.



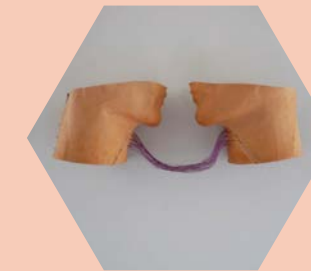
In Beyond Madness, Peter Tomlinson shares his story, offering an intimate glimpse into the mind of someone experiencing psychosis. His account is complemented by two testimonies from his personal circle and seven reflections from experts by experience, care professionals and academics. This book was created in close collaboration with the Department.



In their third bachelor's and second master's years, students complete internships that connect theory with experiential knowledge, including their own. The Department fosters a reflective learning environment where such experiences are seen as strengths, enriching students' professional identity.



The exhibition Kop-zorgen by Marc Reyns was shown at the Recovery College 2024. Marc Reyns, an artist with bipolar disorder, shares his experiences and recovery process through artworks made during and after a psychotic episode, inviting visitors to reflect and engage in conversation.



The Department of Special Needs Education employs experiential knowledge through guest lectures, testimonials, documentaries, and books by experts by experience. It also implements co-teaching, supervision of assignments, and organizes reflection sessions on practical cases.



The Recovery & Addiction research group at the Department of Special Needs Education studies support for recovery in people with addiction or mental health challenges. It focuses on amplifying lived experience and developing care that improves quality of life. Each year, it organizes a Recovery College.



The SEKEHE project integrates experiential knowledge into Social Studies higher education by supporting co-teaching with experts by experience, creating support for students with experiential knowledge, and developing local and transnational frameworks to embed experiential knowledge structurally in curricula.