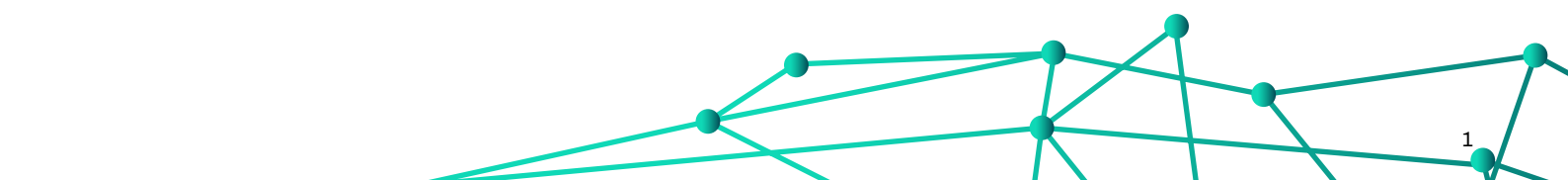
SEKEHE

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Handbook Part 1/4



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Methodological framework
Handbook part 1/4

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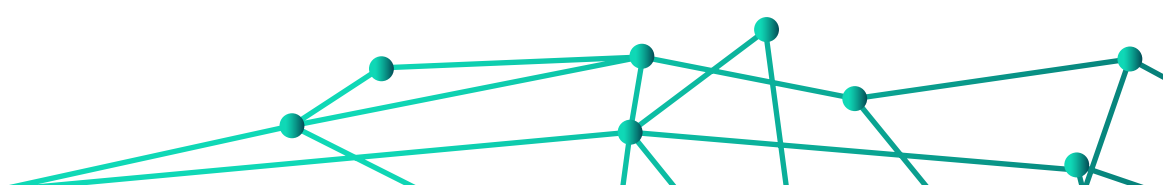

Introduction

How do you structurally embed experiential knowledge in higher education?

This question has guided our work over the past three years, coming together in the framework elaborated herein.
Rather than offering a one-size-fits-all solution, we will present a framework that we hope will serve as an inspiring and reflective tool — a synthesis of lessons learned across multiple work packages. The framework is designed to support higher education institutions in meaningfully integrating experiential knowledge into their educational practices.
At the heart of this framework there are six foundational pillars that challenge you to take a stance on:

1. Why experiential knowledge is fundamental to social studies in higher education.
2. How to build a practice that is intentional and sustainable.
3. What you can do to develop co-teaching.
4. What you can do to develop student support practices.
5. What conditions are needed to support this change.
6. What structural change can look like.

These pillars emerged from hands-on work: setting up co-teaching practices, developing student support formats, and building a shared vision—both within and across partner institutions. All that work has been documented through qualitative questionnaires and reports. These reflections were analysed, interpreted and summed up to uncover recurring themes, challenges, and opportunities.
This framework is not a rulebook. Rather, it is conceived as a dynamic and reflective tool intended to inspire and inform. Each section presents concrete strategies, critical questions, and inspiring examples for embedding experiential knowledge in higher education.
We invite you to reflect, adapt, and act. Whether you are just beginning to explore experiential knowledge or looking to deepen existing practices, we hope it offers both inspiration and practical guidance.
Enjoy the read,

The SEKEHE team

Overview of the pillars

These pillars are foundational as each one addresses a critical dimension of embedding experiential knowledge in higher education, as a core component of teaching, learning,and institutional culture.

The importance of articulating your why.

Experiential knowledge—rooted in lived experience—is essential for disciplines that engage with complex social realities. It challenges dominant narratives, enriches academic discourse, and fosters more inclusive, socially responsive education. Clarifying your why helps anchor your efforts in shared values and purpose.

How do you build a practice?

Embedding experiential knowledge requires more than goodwill; it demands thoughtful, context-sensitive methodologies. This pillar explores the how—from pedagogical strategies to institutional processes—that ensure experiential knowledge is not tokenized but meaningfully integrated.

What can you do to develop co-teaching and student support practices?

Co-teaching and student support are practical entry points for embedding experiential knowledge. They create space for collaboration between academic and experts by experience, and for students to be recognized as sources of knowledge. This pillar offers concrete practices and formats that have proven effective across partner institutions.

What conditions are needed to support this change?

Change doesn't happen in a vacuum. Coaching, mentoring, and institutional support are vital to sustain the people and processes involved. This pillar outlines the enabling conditions—relational, structural, and cultural—that allow experiential knowledge to thrive.

What can structural change look like?

For experiential knowledge to be more than a project or pilot, it must be embedded structurally. This means rethinking policies, roles, curricula, and evaluation systems. This final pillar explores what long-term, systemic change can look like—and how to work toward it.

Pillar one: The importance of articulating your 'why'

Before engaging in the integration of experiential knowledge into higher education, it is essential to reflect on your purpose. Why do you believe this work matters? What values drive your engagement? Clarifying your 'why' provides a foundation for intentional practice, it strengthens the relations between stakeholders and helps ensure that change is transformational rather than merely symbolic.

1.1 A mission grounded in justice and participation

Social studies education must serve more than the transmission of knowledge—it must actively contribute to the realization of human rights, participation, and inclusion. The SEKEHE project is grounded in the belief that higher education has a responsibility not only to teach about justice, but also to enact it within its own structures and practices.
This vision requires confronting existing power dynamics in knowledge creation. Traditional professional and academic paradigms have historically marginalized experiential forms of knowing, reinforcing epistemic hierarchies. The call for epistemic justice is urgent. It calls for a fundamental shift guided by the principle: 'Nothing about us, without us.'

"We always say that our school is for second chances. Such a big part of our students are admitted because of their lived experience. That's not just tolerated — it's celebrated. I used to think my past disqualified me from education. Now, it's my qualification." Expert by experience

This commitment to justice and participation invites us to look critically at the structures and assumptions that shape higher education itself. To truly enact this mission, we must examine how knowledge is defined, who is recognized as a knower, and how lived experience can transform the academic landscape.

"When I saw my story matter to a classroom—it wasn't just about recovery. It was about justice, about changing what counts as knowledge." Expert by experience

Photo 1: No growing without caring - researcher

1.2 Transforming higher education

Higher education has historically privileged disembodied, so-called 'objective' forms of knowledge. However, the lived experiences of students, staff, and community members offer critical insights into the complex social realities academic institutions seek to understand. Collaborating with experts by experience contributes meaningfully to that transformative work. Conventional academic norms often encourage students to separate the personal from the professional. We believe that a good professional acknowledges fundamental value of an experiential knowledge and is committed to critically reflecting upon it. Critically working with experiential knowledge is essential to counteract stigma, dismantle prejudice, and reshape negative perceptions of lived experience and vulnerability.

"Together with a colleague we just gave a lecture on the importance of experiential knowledge. The stories and insights from the experts by experience were the starting point. My role was to reflect on these stories. I find it always so fascinating to feel the attention when students are listening to real life experiences. So, we always receive real life questions. It's the third year we are giving this lecture and the same happens every year. After the course students come to us with personal and professional questions. They often state how much it means for them. That they feel seen and heard." Researcher

Introducing experts by experience into higher education signifies a broader cultural shift. This approach challenges long-held hierarchies of knowledge and brings in diverse ways of seeing, knowing, and being. Such shifts may evoke discomfort or uncertainty. Educators may find themselves grappling with complex questions: is my professional expertise being undermined? What implications does this have for my identity and responsibilities as an educator? These responses are both valid and expected. Meaningful change often disrupts established norms and comfort zones. At the same time, these tensions can be viewed as productive signals that transformation is happening.

"[...] I believe we have made an important contribution to the project. [...] It is really important because we are moving towards a better future. When we talk about the difficulties, it's not to criticize [...] but to grow, to improve. And so... the experience was a great experience because it allowed students, who will later become professionals in the field, to also see certain aspects... and then it will be up to them to improve them together with us." Expert by experience
As these shifts begin to take root, they inevitably reshape the classroom. The integration of experiential knowledge is not only a structural or cultural change—it is also a pedagogical one, with profound implications for how we teach, learn, and relate.

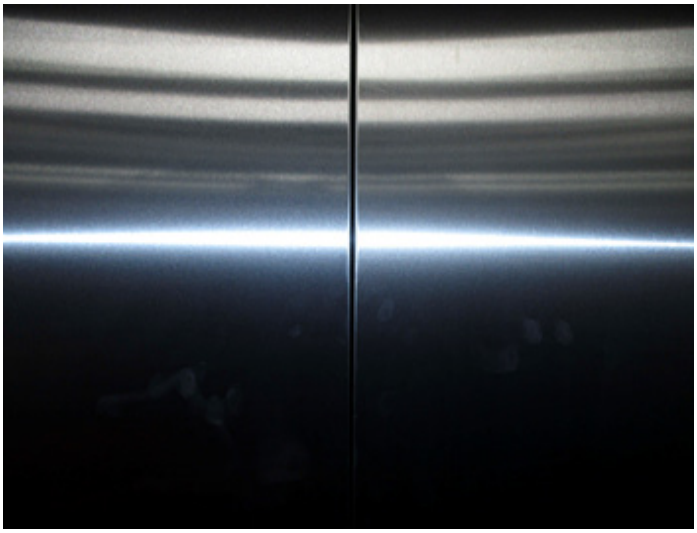

Photo 2: Tackling injustice - researcher

1.3 Teaching for inclusion and social change

Integrating experiential knowledge fundamentally transforms pedagogical practice. It introduces students to a broader range of perspectives, enabling them to engage with more diverse voices and to bridge theory with lived realities. This pedagogical shift challenges students to critically interrogate conventional paradigms and to envision alternative frameworks for understanding. This approach fosters critical thinking, empathy, and a heightened sense of professional and social responsibility. It enhances the relevance of academic content by situating theory and professional knowledge in the context of real lives and communities.

More than that, incorporating a plurality of voices and knowledge systems supports students to connect their own lived experiences and those of others. Ultimately, integrating experiential knowledge contributes to more inclusive, equitable, and socially responsive learning environments.

"The moment I realized this wasn't just about sharing stories but about shifting how we see knowledge itself — it changed how I teach. We're not just teaching content; we're co-creating meaning with people who've lived it." Educator

And yet, even the most inclusive pedagogy cannot succeed if students do not feel they belong. The presence of experiential knowledge in the classroom must be matched by a broader institutional culture that welcomes the whole person and affirms the value of their and others lived realities.

Photo 3: Different sources of knowledge - expert by experience

Photo 4: Shared goals - teacher

1.4 Creating space for belonging

Higher education should be a space for belonging, not exclusion. Yet, for many students, especially those from marginalized or non-dominant backgrounds, a higher education setting can feel like a place where their lived realities are not welcomed. Institutional norms, academic language, and cultural expectations often reflect dominant worldviews, leaving little room for alternative ways of knowing and being.

Large institutions can unintentionally reproduce systems of exclusion. Their size and bureaucracy make it difficult to recognize and respond to the diverse living situations of students. When experiential knowledge is absent from curricula and pedagogical practices, students who carry valuable insights from lived experience may feel invisible, undervalued, or out of place. Engaging with experiential knowledge creates pathways toward more inclusive educational environments. It communicates to students that their stories are valuable, their insights are legitimate, and their experiences are not liabilities but vital sources of knowledge and development. It also challenges educators and institutions to rethink what counts as knowledge, who gets to produce it, and how it is shared.

"You can't just generalize and open a new category in the world. No. You must listen to people's stories and not tell people what their problem is." Expert by experience

Taken together, these reflections point to a deeper narrative: integrating experiential knowledge is not a technical adjustment, but a transformative commitment. It calls for a reimagining of purpose, practice, and power within higher education.

1.5 Conclusion: a commitment to change

Integrating experiential knowledge into higher education is not just a pedagogical choice—it's a commitment to justice, inclusion, and meaningful transformation. Your 'why' is not a slogan, but a guiding motivation that shapes every part of your practice.
Embracing experiential knowledge challenges traditional hierarchies of knowledge and invites a broader range of voices into the classroom. It fosters empathy, critical thinking, and a deeper connection between theory and lived reality.

Once your purpose is clear, the next challenge is figuring out how to act on it. Integrating experiential knowledge into higher education is not just a question of curricular content. It is a question of transforming practices, relationships, and institutional culture. This section explores why the 'how' matters just as much as the 'why' in advancing meaningful change.

"[SEKEHE] is precisely the recognition that you can re-enter society in a different way [...]. And it is truly inclusive because it gives you the opportunity to access other ways of life, to [...] spaces, jobs, etc." Student

Photo 5: Shared battle - teacher

1.6 Further reading

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Parsell, C., Kuskoff, E., & Constantine, S. (2024). What is the scope and contribution of lived experience in social work? A scoping review. British Journal of Social Work, 54(8), 3429–3448. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcad246

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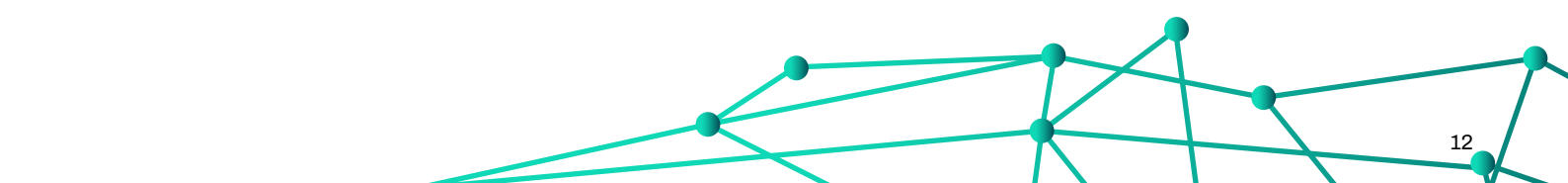


Pillar two: How do you build a practice?

Clarifying your 'why' gives your project direction and integrity. But translating that purpose into action requires intentional work. This section outlines practical steps to co-create a meaningful, shared vision and practice for embedding experiential knowledge within your institution.

2.1 Start with dialogue and collaboration

Developing a meaningful 'why' and translating that into a 'how' starts with dialogue and collaboration. It requires the active involvement of students, educators, experts by experience, administrators, and external partners. The processes through which relationships are built, decisions are made, and collaborative spaces are structured fundamentally shape the tone and direction of any initiative. A thoughtful and participatory process fosters shared ownership, legitimizes complexity, and creates space for navigating uncertainty.

These early conversations should be reflective, inclusive, and open to discomfort. Storytelling, participatory workshops, and creative methods can serve as valuable tools to surface shared values and aspirations.

"When we started collaborating with Experts by experience, we realized that mutual trust and alignment of expectations were essential. Without shared ownership, the process felt extractive." Educator

Step 1: Find your leaders and supporters

Identify individuals who are already engaged and committed. This can be students with lived experience, educators who critically reflect on established norms, and allies within the community. These actors can play a key role in advocating for change, fostering connections, and sustaining long-term momentum. If experts by experience are not yet involved, start by building meaningful relationships with organizations or individuals who can co-create this vision and help shape the process from the outset.
Ask key questions such as:

- Who do we need for this change to happen?
- What relationships do already exist that we can build on?
- Who holds formal and informal influence within the institution or community?
- Who has lived experience that is relevant to the issues we aim to address?

"It started with a walk in the mountains. No classrooms, no pressure. Just us—experts by experience, professors, students—talking, laughing, learning. That's when I knew we were building something real." Coordinator

Step 2: Foster a collaborative dialogue

Create intentional spaces that allow for meaningful dialogue across differences in roles, backgrounds, and power dynamics. Facilitate these interactions with care, prioritizing mutual understanding over consensus. The aim is to build trust and uncover shared values and motivations.

The following practices can support the creation of such spaces and help anchor open dialogue within your process:

- Organize meetings that go beyond logistics and create space for deeper conversations. Encourage participants to reflect on and articulate why working with experiential knowledge matters to them. Use facilitation methods that support psychological and relational safety within the group. Ensure that all participants have opportunities to express them selves — verbally or otherwise — and feel genuinely heard.
- Allow sufficient time for participants to share their perspectives, hesitations, and motivations. Make room for sharing and searching for what connects you. Don't discuss but try to find common ground.
- Recognize that diverse logics may coexist: institutional priorities, personal commitments, and professional frameworks may not always align. Rather than resolving these tensions prematurely, create space to acknowledge and engage with them constructively.

"Every week, I met with colleagues. We'd swap feedback, co-write sections, debate terms. That rhythm—that back-and-forth—is where the project came alive for me." Lecturer

Photo 6: Time to talk - researcher

Step 3: Identify core motivations

Establishing a clear and shared motivation is not a solitary task, but one that requires a collaborative process. Developing a collectively supported vision ensures that all stakeholders can link up their personal motivation to a shared idea. All stakeholders then share an understand of the purpose behind integrating experiential knowledge and actively embody and advocate for it in their roles. Ask key questions such as:

- Why do you want to embed experiential knowledge in your institution?
- Why is that important to you?
- What injustice are we addressing? Who benefits from this change?
- How does this align with our faculty's mission?
- What motivates us? What do we want to change?
- Why is this important in our current department? How do we want to change it?
- Are we modelling inclusion through our process?
- Are stakeholders empowered to co-create, or are they being consulted only after key
- decisions have already been made?

Exercise: Five whys workshop

Goal: Help teams uncover the deeper motivations behind embedding experiential knowledge.
Materials: Flipchart or digital whiteboard, markers or sticky notes.
Steps: 1. Form duos where one person asks the questions and the other answers.
2. Pose the question: 'Why do we want to embed experiential knowledge?'
3. For each answer, ask 'Why is that important?'—repeat five times.
4. Switch who asks the questions and who answers.
5. Document the final insights and share in pairs or small groups.
6. Create a visual map of shared values and motivations.

2.2 Know where you're starting from

Each higher education institution operates within a unique cultural, historical, and structural context. Understanding this context is a necessary first step in exploring the potential for integrating experiential knowledge. A careful assessment of your institution's readiness can help identify opportunities, barriers, and key stakeholders.

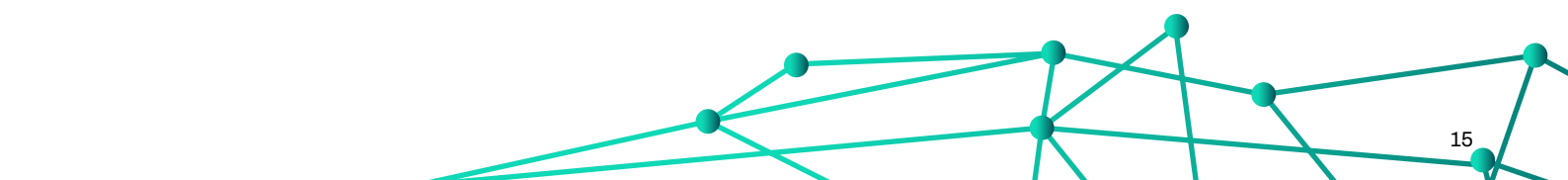
Step 1: Unveil your positionality and power position

Embedding experiential knowledge into academic environments requires a clear understanding of where the call for change originates. Positionality matters: the legitimacy and direction of this work are shaped by the actors involved and the power relations between them.

"When we started mapping our curriculum, we thought: where is lived experience already in the mix? We found it in internships, in hallway conversations, in research. That discovery helped us build outwards with intention." Educator

Reflective questions:

- Who is asking for the embedding of experiential knowledge, and from what institutional or social position?
- From where is the idea coming, is bottom-up or top-down?
- Whose voices are currently missing, underrepresented, or marginalized in your curriculum and institution?
- Is there openness to non-traditional, narrative, or embodied forms of knowing?
- To what extent is experiential knowledge known or recognized among staff and students?



Method: Values mapping

Goal: Identify and align individual and collective values related to experiential knowledge.
Materials: Sticky notes, markers, large paper or digital board.
Steps: 1. Ask each participant to write down 3–5 values they associate with experiential knowledge.
2. Cluster similar values and discuss their meanings.
3. Reflect on how these values align with institutional goals.

Step 2: Asses your institutional culture and readiness

Every institution has its own history and climate. Here, you are asked to examine whether your organisation is culturally and relationally prepared to engage with experiential knowledge —and who within the system is helping move this work forward. Experiential knowledge thrives in collaborative spaces. The degree to which institutions enable meaningful co-creation reflects their willingness to share power and recognise diverse forms of expertise.

This involves examining both formal and informal norms, values, and relationships within the organisation.

Key considerations:

- What is the institution's historical relationship with experiential knowledge?
- Is embedding experiential knowledge part of your institution's core identity, or is this a new initiative?
- Are there 'leaders' or allies within the institution, those who truly believe in the 'movement'?
- Are there ongoing collaborations with experts by experience or organizations grounded in experiential knowledge?
- Does your context have a history of participatory and inclusionary practices that may support this work?

Photo 7: coffee and frames - teacher

Exercise: Institutional readiness self-assessment

Goal: Assess the institution's preparedness for embedding experiential knowledge.
Materials: Printed or digital checklist.
Steps:1. Create a rubric with categories: cultural openness, collaborations, staff awareness, policy support.
2. Have team members rate each item individually.
3. Discuss results and identify areas for growth.

Step 3: Asses your pedagogical practice

Bringing experiential knowledge into education transforms not only what is taught, but how teaching and learning take place. This shift challenges traditional educational paradigms that often prioritize abstract, decontextualized knowledge over lived experience. To meaningfully integrate experiential knowledge, educators must reflect on their own pedagogical assumptions and practices.

Start by examining your curriculum:

- Whose knowledge is represented?
- Are there opportunities for students to connect theory with lived experience?
- Is there space for co-creation of knowledge between students, educators, and experts
- by experience?

Next, consider classroom dynamics:

- Do students feel safe and encouraged to share personal insights?
- Are diverse forms of expression and participation valued?
- How are power relations between educators, students, and guest contributors ad
- dressed?

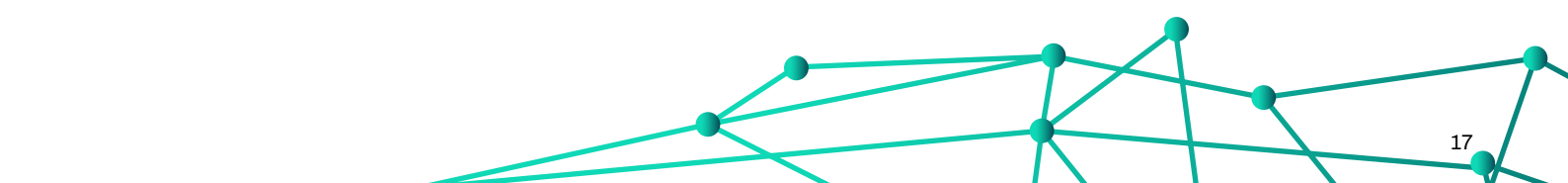
Finally, reflect on the role of the student:

- Are students positioned as passive recipients or active contributors to knowledge?
- How are students prepared to engage with experiential knowledge?
- How can experiential knowledge be recognized as a legitimate and valuable part of their
- learning journey?

Step 4: Consider structural and logistical considerations

For the integration of experiential knowledge to be sustainable, it must be supported by practical structures. This section focuses on the resources, policies, and frameworks that enable or limit the integration of experiential knowledge.
Questions to consider:

- What resources (time, funding, training) are available to support this work?
- Are there policies available to support this integration or do you need to develop policy?
- Do you want to embed experiential knowledge through a paid or voluntary mandate?



2.3 Turning purpose into action

Step 1: Document your dialogue

Document your collective vision within a dynamic, evolving framework. Use it to guide decisions, communicate your purpose, and inspire others. Ensure that it remains accessible and engaging by emphasizing visual elements and narrative storytelling, rather than relying solely on formal policy language.

In our SEKEHE project we worked with the concept of chain letter to document our views on experiential knowledge. The following letter served as an invitation.

Dear reader or writer,

On 9 December 2022 we had the pleasure to kick-off the SEKEHE project in Ostrava. During that meeting we concluded that we need to clarify what we mean with 'experiential knowledge'. We opted to create a chain letter and give each partner a month to write.
So, these letters are starting points for each partner to share their ideas on experiential knowledge. The goal is to get to know each other while at the same time build a common framework. There are no 'rules' on what you can write and how to write it.
These first letters are an open invitation to engage. You can write your own letter, react on what you've read or pick your favourite colour and write through the existing texts.

Photo 8: Blooming and withering - expert by experience

Step 2: Define experiential knowledge

There's no single definition of experiential knowledge. The SEKEHE project embraced the complexity of working with lived experience in higher education, encouraging reflection on how personal and shared experiences shape learning. Three key approaches emerged:

1. Lived experience in becoming a social professionalAt UGent, a reflective framework helped students explore their own life histories, raising awareness of personal blind spots and assumptions. This supported their growth as self- aware, reflective professionals. The University of Ostrava developed a similar self-reflective tool to guidestudents in this process.
2. Lived experience as a student At the University of Milano-Bicocca, a peer-to-peer sup port lab drew on students' lived ex periences to foster community and mutual support. In KBT, former students shared insightson navigating student life, offering guidance and solidarity to current students. At NTNU reflective questions on how students own experiential knowledge is a source of knowledge are included in all teaching
3. Creating space for social issues and experts by experience Initiatives at HOGENT and the University of Ostrava created dedicated spaces for dialogue with individuals who have lived experience of social issues. At UO, students engaged with experts by experence, reflecting on how these encounters challenged and reshaped their professional perspectives.

Clarify your approach: Are you focusing on all lived experience, or specifically on experiences of exclusion or marginalization? Each choice shapes your teaching, recruitment, and inclusion strategies.

"Lived experience was initially seen as just sharing stories. But over time, we reframed it as knowledge in its own right — equal to academic insight, not subordinate to it." Coordinator

Step 3: Create clarity

Experiential knowledge is not yet a widely embedded or familiar paradigm within many higher education settings. Its integration often requires ongoing clarification, dialogue, and reassurance. Questions commonly arise, such as: What does an expert by experience do? How are students expected to engage with this form of knowledge?

Providing clear and accessible guidance early in the process can help to reduce misunderstandings and mitigate resistance as the work unfolds.

"Some educators worry that working with lived experience might cross into therapeutic territory. Others fear it will be messy or risky. But these concerns often reflect deeper assumptions." Staff member

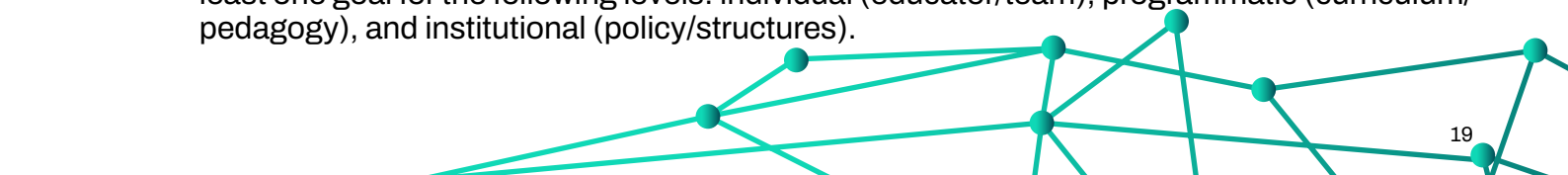
Step 4: Lead by example

Transformational work starts within our immediate academic environments. If we want students to value diverse voices, we must demonstrate this commitment in our own pedagogical practices through the content we deliver, the collaborators we engage, and the institutional priorities we uphold.

This also entails a willingness to critically examine and explicitly name the implicit biases and power structures within our own institutions. By doing so, we model the courage and integrity we expect from our students and colleagues.

Step 5: Set concrete goals

Setting concrete goals helps transform commitment into action. Take the time to formulate at least one goal for the following levels: individual (educator/team), programmatic (curriculum/ pedagogy), and institutional (policy/structures).



Exercise: vision mapping

Goal: Visualize the future state of the institution with experiential knowledge fully embedded.
Materials: Paper, markers, magazines for collage (optional).
Steps:1. Ask teams to draw or collage their institution 3 years from now.
2. The question: 'What does it look like when experiential knowledge is fully embedded?'
3. Take the time to listen to each other's vision.
4. The question: what goals do we need to set to make this future possible?
5. Work in small groups and share the results collectively.
6. Discuss and set goals.

2.4 Support your process

Step 1: Build a committed team

Change begins with people. A committed, diverse team is the backbone of any effort to embed experiential knowledge. This team should include educators, students, experts by experience, and institutional allies who are willing to co-create, challenge assumptions, and support one another.

- Form a core group with clear roles and shared values. Ensure regular meetings with structured agendas and space for collaborative dialogue.
- Secure institutional support early on. Clarify whether roles are voluntary or paid, and advocate for fair recognition and compensation.
- Invest in capacity-building: Offer training sessions, workshops, and reflective spaces for all involved. Focus on co-learning and mutual growth.

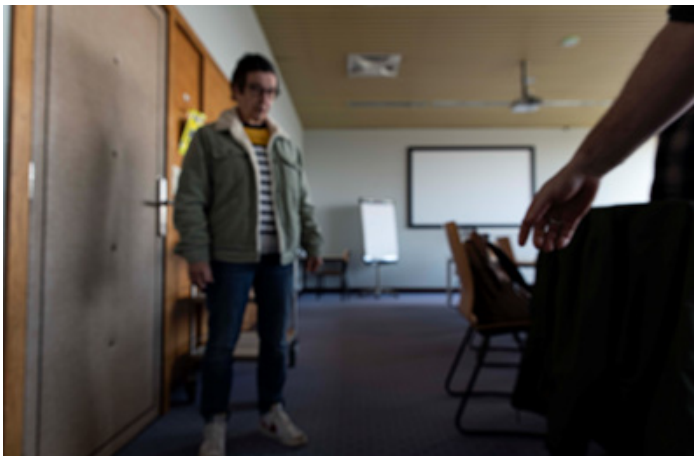


Photo 9: Building relations - researcher

Step 2: Start small, start intentionally

You don't need to overhaul the entire system to begin. Starting small allows you to experiment, build trust, and learn from experience. Early initiatives should be low-risk, relationship-driven, and grounded in shared values.

- Organize an introductory session to share your vision and principles. Invite both academic staff and experts by experience to co-design the process.
- Choose a small-scale setting—a seminar, workshop, or guest lecture—to test co-teaching or reflective dialogue.
- Document your process: Translate your goals and practices into a working document or policy draft to guide future steps.

"One partner started by matching a single expert by experience with a trusted lecturer in a small seminar setting. They co-facilitated one session focused on reflective dialogue using life stories. Afterward, both reported that the intimacy of the setting made it easier to build trust and test boundaries without the pressure of a full course commitment." Staff member

Start small-scale pilot planning

Goal: Design a small-scale pilot to begin embedding experiential knowledge.
Materials: Planning template or worksheet.
Steps: 1. Choose one course or support service to pilot.
2. Define the scope, goals, and roles.
3. Set evaluation criteria and timeline.
4. Document and reflect on the pilot outcomes.

Step 3: Keep the Momentum

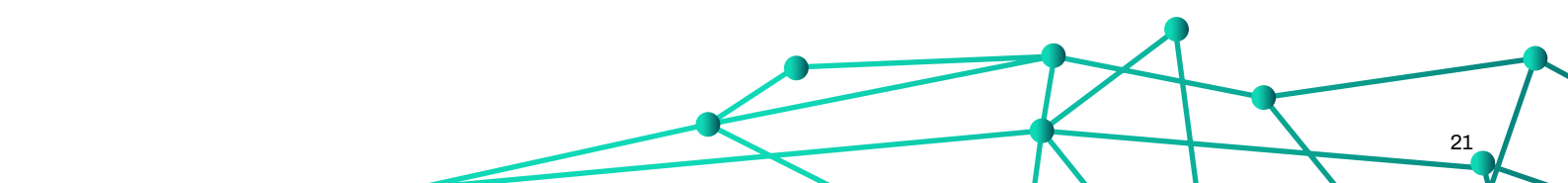
Initial enthusiasm is important—but it's not enough. For experiential knowledge to take root, it must be supported by systems, resources, and long-term thinking. This step is about embedding the work into the institution's fabric.

- Secure resources: Advocate for funding, time, and institutional recognition.
- Create supportive policies: Define roles, responsibilities, and ethical guidelines.
- Build in regular reflection and evaluation: Include lived experience in curriculum reviews and feedback loops.
- Preserve institutional memory: Document practices, distribute leadership, and embed the work across teams to avoid loss during staff turnover.

"It was helpful for the colleagues to hear the 'why' of the project, how we have been working and what the results are. These moments were used as mutual learning." Coordinator

Method: learning harvest

Goal: Gather collective insights at the end of a project or semester.
Materials: Flipcharts, markers, sticky notes.
Steps: 1. Hold a session to gather successes, challenges, and lessons learned.
2. Document ideas for scaling and sustaining practices.
3. Celebrate contributions and plan next steps.



Step 4: Make space to reflect and evolve

Sustainable change is not static—it evolves. Reflection is essential to ensure your work remains relevant, inclusive, and connected to its original purpose. This step is about creating intentional moments to pause, listen, and adapt.

- Schedule regular reflection moments across the academic year.
- Use guiding questions: Are we still aligned with our purpose? Are diverse voices still included? What have we learned from challenges?

"The feedback loop was more than evaluation. It became a space for growth, where Experts by experience and educators jointly redefined their roles every time we met." Staff member

Exercise: impact reflection journal

Goal: Encourage ongoing reflection and documentation of change.
Materials: Journals or digital templates.
Steps: 1. Invite stakeholders to keep a journal over a semester.
2. Use prompts: What changed in your thinking? What surprised you?
3. Share insights in a closing reflection session.

2.5 Conclusion: your how are your values

Building your 'how' is an ongoing process. There is no singular or ideal pathway toward the integration of experiential knowledge. However, sustained progress can be achieved through clarity of purpose, shared commitment, and collaborative engagement. Start with the resources and relationships currently available, remain anchored in your core values, and allow your approach to evolve over time.

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Pillar three: Key elements in co-teaching practices in higher education

Co-teaching in higher education, particularly when involving experts by experience, offers rich pedagogical value. This synthesis outlines practical approaches and critical lessons learned from the five partner institutions engaged in the SEKEHE project. The strategies outlined below focus on collaborative relationships, reflective learning environments, and adaptive pedagogical frameworks, providing a roadmap for meaningfully integrating co-teaching in both curriculum and institutional culture.

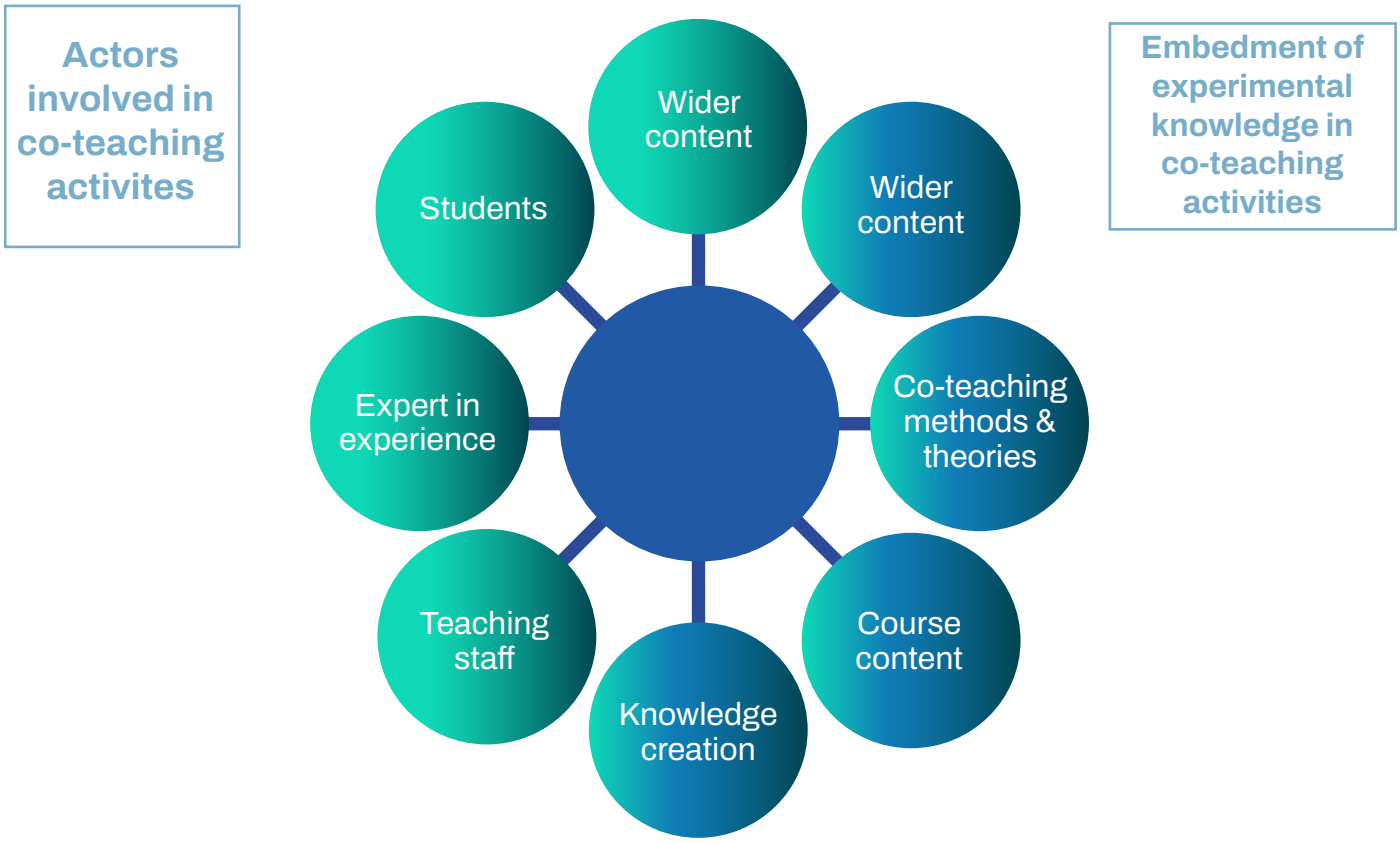
Effective co-teaching is as much about relational practice as it is about methodology. Institutions should invest not just in training and resources, but also in fostering an ethos of inclusion, humility, and shared authority across all layers of education.

3.1 The flower framework

The flower framework provides a structured approach in both visualising and analysing the dynamics of co-teaching. It was developed with an appreciation for the unique cultural contexts, strengths and challenges of each partner organisation. The flower framework consists of eight dimensions related to (1) the actors involved in co-teaching activities and (2) the embedment of experiential knowledge within these activities.

This framework supports the documentation of key aspects such as the involved actors, timelines, processes, dynamics and envisioned milestones for each co-teaching activity. The framework's supports learning from individual co-teaching practices, fosters collective understanding, and inspires others.

Figure 1: The flower framework.



Wider content

- What is the vision and policy on co-teaching knowledge in your organization?
- How do you monitor the way the co-teaching activites also might influence the organization?
- Which theoretical framework underpins the co-teaching activites?
- Who is considered an expert by experience in your organization?
- Do teaching staff and experts by experience receive a training in co teaching?

Students

- How do students experience the co-teaching activities?
- What methods do you use to monitor student experiences?
- Is there attention paid towards students with experiential knowledge on the the taught topics? How?

Expert in experience

- What are the experiences of the experts by experience on the co-teaching activities?
- What are the experiences of experts by experience regarding their relationship with the co-teacher?
- How do you currently monitor these experiences?
- How are involved experts by experience paid/ acknowledged for their work?

Teaching staff

- What are the experiences of the teaching staff on the co-teaching activities?
- What are the experiences of the teaching staff regarding their relationship with the expert by experience?
- How do you currently monitor these experiences?

Wider content

- What is the vision and policy regarding the role of experiential knowledge in your organization?
- Which aspects underlie this vision? Is there any theoretical framework?
- When is this vision challenged?
- What status are you willing and able to assign to experiential knowledge? To what extent does this status fit within the system of higher education? How do you ensure it fits?
- What counts as experimential knowledge in your organization and what not?
- When do you (do not) use experiential knowledge?
- How do you implement experiential knowledge into co-teaching?
- Which conditions are necessary to make co-teaching successful?

Co-teaching methods & theories

- How do the teaching activities take shape?
- Which teaching methods (e.g. lecture, storytelling, interactive group work,...) do you use in the co-teaching activities?
- How do you monitor and evaluate these methods?
- What is monitored? And how? What is done with the collected information? What lessons have you learned from this?
- How does the evaluation of the course take place?

Course content

- How and when is experiential knowledge embedded in the content of the teaching activities?
- How do you co-create the content of the teaching activities? Who sets the agenda?
- How do you monitor the content creation of the teaching activities?
- What is monitored? And how? What is done with the collected information? What lessons have you learned from this?

Knowledge creation

- Which (type of) knowledge do you want to create? / What is the purpose of using experiential knowledge?
- What conditions must be met to realize this?
- How do you translate this into your vision about experiential knowledge and co-teaching?
- How do the teaching activities cintribute to this?
- How could we monitor this? What is monitored? And how? What is done whit the collected information? What lessons have you learned from this?

Method: flower framework workshop

Goal: Map and reflect on co-teaching practices using the flower framework.
Materials: Flower framework diagram, markers.
Steps: 1. Introduce the eight dimensions of the flower framework.
2. Have teams fill in petals with real examples from their context.
3. Discuss gaps and opportunities for growth.

3.2 Building collaborative foundations

Trust and collaboration must be deliberately cultivated through shared time, active listening, and sustained dialogue. Co-teaching becomes effective when all partners feel equally engaged and respected. It is therefore essential to allocate time before the teaching process begins for discussing expectations, exploring shared values, and clarifying boundaries and strengths. Some partner institutions used weekend workshops or low-pressure planning meetings to build this foundation. This is where alignment happens — not just in logistics, but in purpose.

Co-teaching teams that feel safe together are more likely to experiment, adjust, and support one another. That safety emerges through open, inclusive spaces where questions can be asked freely and differences are valued.

Key practices:

- Allocate time for expectation-setting, boundary clarification, and value exploration.
- Use low-pressure planning formats (e.g., weekend workshops) to build relationships.
- Embed planning and reflection time into course design through formal recognition (contracts, schedules, resources).

“I co-taught the Disability Studies course. I was there every week. I didn’t just share my story. I gave feedback, joined evaluations. The students saw me as a colleague, not a guest.” Expert by experience

Photo 10: Willingness to go for the surprise basket - expert by experience

3.3 Empowering reflective learning environments

Integrating co-teaching into the classroom evokes emotional and cognitive responses that require thoughtful pedagogical framing. Students may find themselves feeling moved, unsure, or challenged. In this context, reflection becomes a pedagogical bridge, enabling students to make sense of what they're hearing, and what it stirs in them. But this only works if the space feels emotionally safe.
Methods like photovoice, journaling, or structured reflection questions can help. However, facilitation matters most. When educators and experts by experience model openness and listen without judgment, students are more likely to do the same.
Key practices:

- Use grounding rituals (e.g., check-ins, quiet moments, closing rounds) to open and close sessions.
- Integrate methods like photovoice, journaling, and structured reflection prompts.
- Model openness and non-judgmental listening as educators and co-teachers.

"Creating safe spaces was a foundational part of our co-teaching model. Students were invited into reflection through storytelling, group discussions, and even theatre of the oppressed techniques. We learned that structured rituals—like opening check-ins or guided debriefs—made it safer to engage with discomfort." Educator

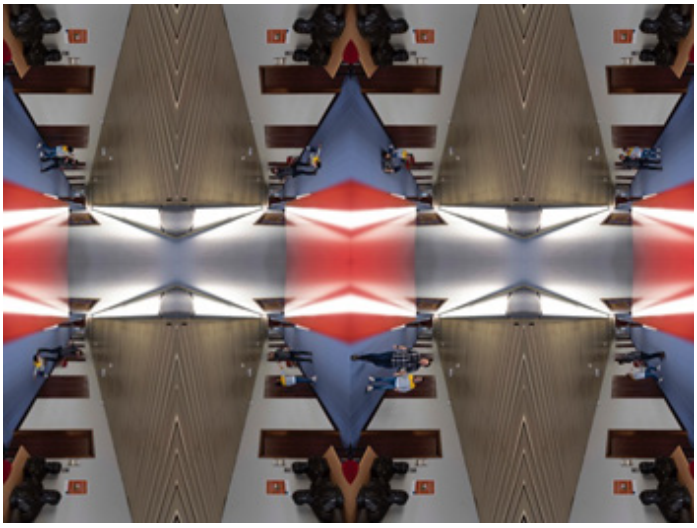


Photo 11: learning to act - teacher & expert by experience

3.4 Designing inclusive course content

Truly inclusive course content doesn't just add experiential knowledge; it builds upon it as a foundational element. When experts by experience are involved in shaping the questions, structure, and aims of the course, the educational experience becomes more grounded, nuanced and engaging.

Inclusive content is also about form. Diverse formats, such as posters, workshops, stories, and creative assignments invite students to engage with material differently. These approaches allow space for emotional complexity and ambiguity, which are often excluded from conventional academic discourse.
Key practices:

- Use diverse formats (e.g., posters, creative assignments, group analysis) to support multiple learning styles.
- Blend experiential knowledge with structured tools to allow for emotional complexity and ambiguity.
- Create space for students to contribute their own lived experiences.

Photo 12: reflecting is adapting - researcher

3.5 Valuing the contributions of experts by experience

Experts by experience contribute more than personal narratives. They bring presence, relational intelligence, and often a deep ability to sense what's unspoken in a room. Their contribution is integral to the co-teaching process and should be recognized as such. Recognition should be both practical and symbolic. This includes appropriate financial compensation, access to institutional systems, formal roles within teaching teams, and visibility and acknowledgment within curricula, evaluations, and strategic discussions.
Key practices:

- Involve experts from the outset of course development.
- Ensure appropriate compensation, access to systems, and formal roles.
- Credit their contributions in course materials, evaluations, and strategic discussions.

"Despite enthusiasm for co-teaching, unresolved legal questions and lack of formal role recognition made it hard to engage EBEs. It was only through the persistence and relational work of administrative staff that these barriers began to shift." Staff member
"[...] being able to say that you were involved, that you received compensation because your work has value, is very important for them [the experts by experience] and for us." Staff member

Photo 13: integrating lived experience - teacher & expert by experience

3.6 Fostering student growth and engagement

Students learn deeply when they feel seen, heard, and challenged in meaningful ways. Co-teaching that centres lived experience offers students transformative learning opportunities but also requires thoughtful support. Some students may be encountering lived experience narratives for the first time. Others may carry their own histories, unspoken and unresolved.

We can't assume students know how to process this. Educators should offer structured opportunities for both cognitive and affective processing. It helps for example to offer time, space, and language for reflection. Even small prompts such as 'What stayed with you today?' can create meaningful entry points for deeper engagement.
Key practices:

- Offer structured opportunities for both cognitive and emotional processing.
- Use low-stakes reflection tools (e.g., journals, dialogue prompts).
- Normalize discomfort as part of the learning process.

"I didn't expect students to open up so much. One came to me after class and said, 'Your session helped me rethink my whole approach to support work.' That's the power of being in the room together." Expert by experience

3.7 Methodological adaptability

There's no singular model for co-teaching. Some experts by experience want to be in the classroom every week. Others contribute best through planning, feedback, or one key session. The method should adapt to the needs and strengths of the partnership.
Flexibility means naming expectations, adjusting along the way, and choosing methods that fit the group. Whether it's dialogue, story, art, theory, or movement—what matters is intentionality and mutual agreement.

At the start of the collaboration, develop a shared 'menu' of teaching tools with your co-educator. Check in regularly and adjust based on the needs of both the team and the students.

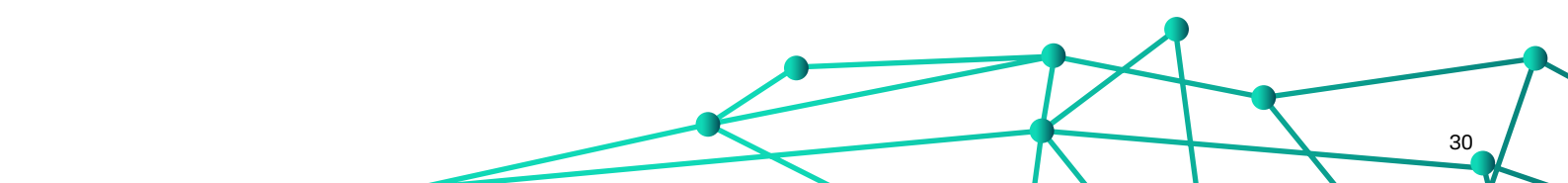
"We ran the lecture together. I'd bring the personal story, and my co-teacher would add the theory. It felt like a dance—two rhythms coming together to make sense of something complex." Educator

3.8 Addressing institutional barriers

Even with the best intentions, institutional systems often present barriers. These may include the absence of formal employment pathways, limited system access, or administrative procedures that reinforce exclusion. These details seem small, but they carry meaning. They tell people whether they belong.
Key practices:

- Move from ad hoc solutions to structural change.
- Develop accessible co-teaching guidelines that define roles and support structures.
- Reflect critically on institutional practices: What kind of educational environment are we creating?

"Despite enthusiasm for co-teaching, unresolved legal questions and lack of formal role recognition made it hard to engage EBEs. It was only through the persistence and relational work of administrative staff that these barriers began to shift." Coordinator



3.9 Conclusion: Toward Structural Integration

To move from symbolic inclusion to genuine transformation, experiential knowledge must be embedded structurally. This means aligning policies, roles, and resources with the values of inclusion and co-creation.
Key practices:

- Create long-term plans that include experiential knowledge in curricula, staffing, and strategy.
- Develop shared language and frameworks to guide collaboration.
- Recognize that structural change is not about perfection. It's about commitment, clarity, and care.

"If we believe experiential knowledge is vital, then our structures must reflect that belief. Symbolic gestures are not enough."

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Pillar four: Key elements of developing student support practices

Student support in higher education is not just about the facilitation of academic achievement. It plays a critical role in fostering belonging, resilience, and the recognition of lived experience. While traditional support structures in higher education typically rely on professional and academic perspectives, they often fail to sufficiently incorporate experiential knowledge derived from students' own life trajectories.
Throughout the SEKEHE project, support systems that acknowledge and integrate students' lived experiences have demonstrated the potential to:

- Foster an inclusive institutional culture where students feel comfortable sharing their lived experiences.
- Create supportive spaces for students to openly discuss their experiences and insights, making room for peer-to-peer support and innovative support formats.
- Engage teaching and support staff in collaborative support approaches that blend professional, academic, and experiential knowledge.
- Create supportive spaces for students to develop their experiential knowledge in relation to their professional growth and development.

"The WRAP program created a community of students that continued even after the official sessions ended. It showed how shared stories reduce isolation and build connection." Staff member

4.1 Working with and from your context

Creating effective student learning support begins with a close look at your local institutional context. Rather than adopting external models, it is vital to explore existing initiatives, institutional cultures, and student needs within your own context. Many institutions already have innovative projects underway, but these often operate in isolation and lack of institutional embedding. A contextual approach entails mapping current practices and engaging in dialogue with student services, policy teams, or faculty to uncover opportunities for greater synergy. Equally important is understanding the lived realities of students themselves. Through surveys, informal conversations or staff insights, institutions can uncover the daily realities and pressures students face. Listening is the foundation of inclusive support. But this process also requires collaboration. Support efforts can only succeed when they involve key stakeholders who bring valuable, practical knowledge to the table.

At the same time, higher education institutions must reflect on whether they are ready to centre lived experience. Hierarchical cultures or traditions of academic detachment may resist participatory methods. Posing the question "Are we ready for this?" is both a reflective and strategic necessity in setting achievable and sustainable goals.

Photo 16: Who is leading? - Staff member

4.2 Understanding the 'why': the foundation of student support

Every strong support initiative is rooted in purpose. Prior to implementation, It's essential to ask: who are we supporting, and what change do we want to create?
For instance, the foundational 'why' may involve addressing the lack of experiential knowledge within student services, or the desire to establish safe environments for students to share personal narratives. Other motivations might include supporting students in vulnerable circumstances or enhancing the social fabric of student communities.

Once you've established your 'why,' it becomes possible to determine the appropriate approach ('How?'). Some teams have integrated lived experience into every step, ensuring that all decisions are made collaboratively with stakeholders. Others emphasize shared ownership, creating safe environments that encourage learning and transformation. No matter the context, focusing on cross-pollination of perspectives and continuous reflection helps build a richer support system. The concrete tools and actions you will use ('What?') flow naturally from your why and how. These tangible outcomes might include surveys, group discussions, or experience-sharing formats like WRAP sessions. You might also develop self-reflective tools, webinars, and peer-support groups. Before moving forward, take a moment to reflect:

- Have we taken enough time to clarify our 'why'?
- Does our 'how' align with our core vision?
- Are our 'what' elements accessible, inclusive, and rooted in student needs?

Exercise: student journey mapping

Goal: Identify opportunities to integrate lived experience into the student lifecycle.
Materials: Timeline template, markers.
Steps: 1. Map the student experience from entry to graduation.
2. Identify crucial moments, challenging moments and opportunities for support.
3. Choose one moment or challenge to work with.
4. Create dialogue with stakeholders to determine a shared goal.

Photo 16: Growing through the structures - researcher

4.3 Co-designing and co-creating solutions

Co-creation is a cornerstone of inclusive student support and involves the meaningful participation of students as co-designers of practices and structures. This collaborative process requires intentionality, time, and a reconfiguration of traditional roles.
Co-creation often means shifting traditional roles. Students are no longer passive recipients; they become contributors and facilitators. This shift can be empowering, deepening engagement and ownership. For staff, it involves letting go of control and embracing a more horizontal way of working.

The process itself becomes transformative. It's where shared language is built, relationships form, and a culture of collaboration emerges. In this way, co-creation is a commitment to democratic, inclusive learning.

4.4 Integrating experiential knowledge in support practices

There is no singular or universal way to work with experiential knowledge in higher education. Each approach has its own value, and each stem from a specific purpose for building student support. Often, these approaches overlap or blend, creating crossovers that enrich the work. This section is not a list of methods to choose from but rather an invitation to explore and strengthen how you engage with lived experience, experiential knowledge, and experts by experience.
A key starting point is to reflect on how and why you incorporate lived experience into your student support formats. Here are some approaches:

- All lived experience: Emphasizing the broad range of personal experiences students bring with into the academic space.
- Lived experience as a student: Focusing on how students navigate higher education, including institutional barriers and feelings of anonymity or marginalization.
- Lived experience related to social issues: Exploring experiences connected to broader societal challenges, such as mental health, poverty, or discrimination.

An important conceptual distinction must be made between the development of experiential knowledge and institutional learning. The former is about supporting students and staff in reflecting on and learning from experiential knowledge. This approach focuses on the individual and their growth through storytelling, reflection, and self-awareness.

Institutional learning, on the other hand, uses lived experiences as a resource to inform and improve policies, services, and organizational culture. This approach is broader and aims at systemic change. Both are valuable, but they require different methods and levels of commitment.

4.5 Engaging with lived experience: learning, connecting, and transforming

Integrating lived experience into higher education makes waves. When experiential knowledge is recognized as a legitimate and valuable form of insight, it starts to challenge us. This section highlights four key areas where institutions will notice how working with experiential knowledge 'forces' you to focus on: normalizing its presence, fostering professional development, enabling institutional learning, and addressing power and stigma.

A Focus on Normalizing the Sharing of Lived Experience

Normalizing lived experience creates spaces where people feel recognized as whole persons, rather than merely students. Programs like WRAP demonstrate how shared stories foster community, reduce isolation, and build empathy. At HOGENT, this even led to staff taking up self-care tools, demonstrating how the ripple effect can extend beyond students.

"At first, I felt alone in my experience. Then I joined the reflection group. It wasn't therapy — it was just real talk about what it's like to be here, to study with all this history. And that made all the difference." Student

A Focus on Professional Development

Engaging with lived experience also fosters professional development among educators and staff. Reflection tools used at the Universities of Ostrava and Ghent encouraged learners to connect theory, practice, and personal insight. Staff reported becoming more aware of their own positionality, shifting traditional roles and enhancing professional learning.

"We ran workshops, not lectures. One on boundaries really stuck with me. Students said it was the first time they felt their personal and professional identities were both welcomed in the same space." Educator

A Focus on Institutional Learning

For transformative change to be sustainable, institutions must build structures that support the integration of experiential knowledge into their systems and practices. At the University of Ostrava, safe spaces allowed for honest reflection and deep learning outside of formal assessment frameworks. Similarly, the University of Milano-Bicocca showed how student voices can guide service improvement, helping organizations reconnect with what students really need.

"At the University of Ostrava, regular reflection spaces with experts by experience led to staff rethinking their pedagogical roles and questioning who gets to hold authority in the classroom. Some educators began inviting feedback from experts by experience on course design and student engagement, shifting the traditional power dynamic." Coordinator

A Focus on Power, Stigma, and Inequality

Integrating lived experience into student support structures inevitably raises questions concerning power dynamics, stigma, and the legitimacy of different knowledge forms. When experts by experience propose changes that are only accepted once echoed by staff, persistent hierarchies are revealed. Institutions must reflect on whose voices are trusted, who feels safe to speak, and how to reduce the stigma that can silence experiential knowledge.

"One student said they were afraid to speak about their mental health because 'being honest might make them look unstable to professors.' These dynamics still exist." Educator

Photo 18: Tresholds - Staff member

Photo 19: Do we learn from the duckling? - Staff member

4.6 Conclusion

These focus areas remind us that integrating lived experience into student support structures is about transformation. It challenges institutions to rethink how knowledge is valued, how relationships are built, and how support is offered. It addressed the diverse needs of support in relation to professional development and mental health. `

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Photo 20: Inside out and outside in - teacher

Pillar five: What conditions are needed to support 'the change'

Support within higher educational settings extends beyond addressing immediate needs. It plays a pivotal role in cultivating a culture of care, empowerment, and inclusion across all levels of education. When aiming to structurally embed experiential knowledge in higher education, intentional and systemic forms of support become essential — for students, experts by experience, and teaching staff.

5.1 Supporting change for all

Integrating lived experience challenges traditional hierarchies of knowledge and reshapes educational culture. It reconfigures roles, disrupts entrenched power structures, and invites institutions to reimagine how knowledge is defined, validated, and shared. This kind of systemic change can provoke uncertainty, resistance, or even conflict. Without support structures, promising initiatives risk becoming unsustainable.
Support structures are crucial for navigating these transitions. They provide spaces for processing these challenges — spaces to reflect, recalibrate, and care for those navigating unfamiliar roles and dynamics.

"At one institution, experts by experience proposed curriculum changes that were initially dismissed — until a staff member echoed the same ideas. Only then were they taken seriously. This revealed the persistent hierarchies in play and highlighted the need for real, not symbolic, power-sharing." Researcher

Exercise: role reflection cards

Goal: Encourage empathy and understanding across stakeholder roles.
Materials: Cards with role descriptions (educator, EBE, admin, student).
Steps: 1. Distribute cards and form small groups.
2. Reflect on: What support does this role need? What challenges does the stakeholder face?
3. Discuss what challenges are shared and which are specific.
4. Discuss how other roles can offer support.
5. Discuss how the institution can offer support.

5.2 A warm welcome is not enough

The inclusion of experts by experience within academic contexts requires more than a warm welcome. Institutions must provide structural support: clear onboarding processes, appropriate contracts and renumeration, campus access and administrative support, peer mentoring, and designated support contacts. These components signal that contributions are valued and that institutional inclusion is not contingent on informal goodwill alone.

“I had a meeting with an educator on a campus. I was given the address, and the idea was to go through the entrance, follow the road and go through the central hallway. There were all these parking’s and building and I felt like getting lost in the whole thing. This meeting was meant to make me feel welcome, but I felt so small compared to the size of the institute and to the size of the buildings
Even though we agreed to have coffee together, I felt like I was not allowed to go through the central hallway. There were some signs there, so I walked around instead of going through the hallway. In hindsight, these signs were not stating that the entrance was blocked or that it was forbidden to access. It was just, I walked around because I felt that I didn’t belong.” Expert by experience

5.3 A responsibility toward students

Experiential knowledge is not always recognized as part of professional expertise in the social field. As students learn to understand, value, and work with experiential knowledge through the guidance of experts by experience, they may encounter discomfort or resistance. Some may not feel safe enough to engage, while others may feel pressure to hide their own lived experiences.
Throughout the project, it became evident that encountering experiential knowledge can evoke strong emotional responses, ranging from recognition and resonance to disruption and vulnerability. This underscores the need for thoughtful, inclusive support as students navigate this complex learning process.

Photo 21: Collective Circle - Jakub Kremer

5.4 Experts by experience as a distinct professional role

Being an expert by experience is far more than anecdotal storytelling. It involves translating lived experience into educational insight. This entails facilitating reflective processes, guiding group dialogue, and holding space for difficult conversations.
The professionalization of this role comes with specific challenges: managing boundaries, facing institutional bias, and often bearing the weight of proving the concept's worth.
Support for experts by experience must therefore be sustained, comprehensive, and structurally embedded. This includes access to professional development, regular peer reflection and supervision, as well as formal avenues for feedback and debriefing. The institutionalisation of the role requires a long-term vision that recognizes experts by experience not as add-ons, but as core contributors to teaching and learning processes.

5.5 Educators and institutional staff are changing too

The integration of experiential knowledge into higher education also has significant implications for educators and institutional staff. Co-teaching with experts by experience or engaging with experiential content may invite a sense of professional vulnerability. It often requires educators to reflect on their own positionality, pedagogical approaches, and boundaries.
Throughout the project, some educators raised questions around vulnerability, such as concerns about how to appropriately engage with sensitive topics or how to protect students from discomfort. These responses revealed not only professional vulnerability but also underlying assumptions about what constitutes legitimate knowledge and authority.
Institutional support for staff could include workshops on inclusive pedagogy, facilitated spaces for critical reflection, and opportunities for peer exchange. A culture of care must extend to all stakeholders, not just students or experts by experience.

"The educators who participated said their entire pedagogical perspective changed. They began seeing vulnerability not as something to protect against, but something to make room for." Coordinator

Photo 22: Institutional searching - Researcher
Photo 23: Embracing reflection - teacher

5.6 How to build conditions for change

Support within educational institutions should not be understood as a fixed set of services or procedures. Rather, it constitutes a dynamic, relational system shaped by the evolving needs, insights, and contributions of all those involved. This chapter focuses on how to design and sustain coaching and support structures that are inclusive, dynamic, and meaningful for students, staff, and experts by experience.

Step 1: Building institutional support and professional development

Effective support systems require structural commitment and adequate resources. This includes time allocation, dedicated personnel, and tailored training. To ensure sustainable collaboration, institutions should invest in the ongoing development of all participants involved in co-educational processes.
Address these questions:

- What are your key strategies in offering development sessions for experts by experience and educators on co-teaching, inclusion and collaborative practice?
- Do you have an institutional position for your experts by experience through contracts?
- Is there supervision and feedback available for experts by experience?
- Do you have any learning community for staff to share challenges and adapt together?

"Without a contract, I didn't feel like a real colleague. The admin staff at UNIMIB fought for me to get one. When I got that ID badge, it meant I belonged here." Expert by experience

Method: support ecosystem mapping

Goal: Visualize and assess the support structures within the institution.
Materials: Large paper or digital board, markers.
Steps: 1. Map all formal and informal support structures.
2. Take your time to draw the several actors, services and how they connect.
3. Identify gaps, overlaps, and opportunities.
4. Use the map to open the dialogue with policy members and possible routes for improvement.

Step 2: Cultivate a supportive and collaborative culture

Support thrives in a culture of trust. This means open conversations, accessible pathways for feedback, and flexibility in how people engage.
Collaboration should not be positioned as an exceptional or supplementary feature of academic life: it should constitute its core. Institutions play a key role in creating environments in which individuals feel safe to ask for help, to share vulnerabilities, and to offer support to others. Informal forms of peer support are often just as powerful as formal services. Institutions should nurture spaces where students, experts by experiences, and staff feel safe enough to ask for help, offer support, and learn together.
Address these key questions:

- Are there accessible and safe channels for giving and receiving feedback?
- Do our institutional structures support collaboration—or unintentionally hinder it?
- Are there spaces—physical or relational—where people feel safe to be vulnerable?
- How do we respond when collaboration becomes difficult or breaks down?
- What practices do help us build and maintain a culture of shared responsibility?

Step 3: Widening a supportive pedagogical approach

Pedagogy is not neutral — it shapes how students engage, what knowledge is valued, and who feels seen or silenced in the learning environment. A supportive pedagogical approach is essential for embedding experiential knowledge in ways that are ethical, inclusive, and transformative. This approach requires intentional design and ongoing reflection.
From course materials to classroom interactions, students should receive clear messages that lived experiences are legitimate sources of insight and reflection. It's a clear signal that lived experience is valued, not stigmatized:

This means designing learning environments that create space for emotional processing and dialogue. Working with lived experience can evoke strong emotions. Discomfort is not a sign of failure — it's often a sign that deep learning is taking place. Educators should be prepared to hold space for uncertainty, vulnerability, and growth. In this way discomfort can be normalized as a part of learning.
Students and educators need spaces where these emotions can be acknowledged and processed safely. It's therefore needed to provide clear support ways. Students engaging with experiential knowledge—whether their own or others'—should know where to turn for support, whether academic, emotional, or practical.
Address these key questions:

- How do we prepare educators to facilitate emotionally complex conversations in the classroom?
- What signals — explicit or implicit — do we send about the value of lived experience in our teaching?
- Are there safe, accessible spaces for students to process emotional responses to course content?
- How do we respond when discomfort arises in the classroom?
- Do we lean into it as a learning opportunity?
- What support systems are in place for students who may be triggered or overwhelmed by certain topics?
- How do we ensure that experts by experience are supported during and after their con
- tributions to teaching?

Step outside the box: An open campus model

The University of Ghent developed an 'open campus' where community organizations and experts by experience have a visible, everyday presence. This model bridges the gap between academia and lived experience. It fosters sustained relationships, trust, and shared ownership of learning spaces.
An open campus model is more than a location—it's a mindset of permeability, inclusion, and mutual respect. It fosters long-term relationships and invites all actors within the educational ecosystem to engage as whole persons, not merely through professional or academic roles.
It also challenges institutions to rethink who is allowed to shape knowledge, and how learning environments can reflect the realities of the communities they serve.

"Sharing office space with experts by experience fostered a level of collaboration that cannot be achieved through occasional visits — this integration shaped the department's culture." Educator
Key questions:

- How accessible and welcoming are our learning spaces to people outside the academic community?
- In what ways do we make room for community voices and lived experience in the everyday life of the institution?
- Are there physical or symbolic barriers that prevent permeability between the university and the community?
- What shared spaces—formal or informal—exist for dialogue, collaboration, and co-creation?

5.7 Conclusion

Building effective support systems is not primarily a technical task, but a relational and ethical commitment. Support should be responsive, intentional, and rooted in the shared vision of an inclusive and caring educational community.

5.8 Further reading

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Photo 24: Searching for integration - teacher
Photo 25: Making the road - teacher

Pillar six: What can structural change look like?

The integration of experiential knowledge into higher education cannot be sustained as a temporary initiative or an isolated pedagogical innovation. It constitutes a paradigm shift, one that necessitates enduring structural transformation. Without institutional anchoring, these practices remain fragile, dependent on individual commitment. This section explains why structural thinking is essential and what it takes to sustain transformation.
+ rework: Structural change requires embedded commitments, intentional policies, and a willingness to reimagine how institutions work. This section outlines how higher education institutions can translate experiential practices into sustainable, systemic change.

6.1 The third mission and epistemic justice

In recent years, many higher education institutions have embraced the 'third mission' that extends beyond teaching and research, encompassing civic and social engagement. Embedding experiential knowledge aligns directly within this mission, aiming to democratize whose knowledge counts and whose voices shape learning.
At the heart of this work lies the principle of epistemic justice: ensuring that people with lived experience are not only invited into academia but are empowered to contribute to and shape knowledge production. This requires a reconfiguration of academic authority, credibility, and legitimacy.

6.2 The danger of a tokenistic approach

Tokenism happens when experts by experience are asked to 'share their story' but remain structurally excluded from influence. It also happens when institutions adopt experiential formats for appearance rather than impact. True inclusion requires shared ownership, co-creation, and recognition of experiential knowledge as equal to academic and professional insight. Without concrete action, even well-meaning efforts can end up lacking impact or reinforcing existing imbalances.

"A colleague once asked: 'Will they tell their story again this year?' That question revealed a mindset problem. We are not inviting people to repeat stories — we're inviting them to teach." Educator

Photo 26: Conflict and growth - researcher

6.3 Recognizing the unequal position of experts by experience

In many higher education institutions, there is no clear job role, funding line, or pathway for experts by experience. Their work is often precarious, invisible in formal structures, or excluded from meetings and decisions.
Structural change demands the formal recognition and integration of experts by experience into the academic system. This includes:

- defining responsibilities,
- providing fair and consistent remuneration,
- ensuring long-term support.

It also means recognizing that experts by experience face more than professional challenges: they navigate institutional cultures that may not yet value their contributions.

6.4 Making experiential knowledge a structural component

To move from ad hoc inclusion to genuine institutional transformation, experiential knowledge must become a structural component of the academic ecosystem. This involves integration across five key domains.

Exercise: policy audit

Goal: Evaluate pedagogical practice // the curriculum // institutional culture // institutional policy // support structures through the lens of experiential knowledge.
Materials: Copies of relevant policies, curricula, strategic documents... audit checklist.
Steps: 1. Choose one topic to work on.
2. Read and review the different documents and ask: Does this recognize lived experience and experiential knowledge? Does it support participation and inclusion?
3. Highlight areas for revision or new policy development.
4. Propose concrete changes.

Photo 27: Integration? - teacher

In pedagogical practice

Experiential knowledge should be meaningfully interwoven with academic and professional expertise in everyday teaching.
How to do it:

1. Integrate co-teaching formats that bring together educators and experts by experience.
2. Use diverse teaching methods that invite reflection, dialogue, and storytelling.
3. Provide training for educators on how to engage with experiential knowledge ethically and effectively.
4. Develop a clear pedagogical vision that values multiple ways of knowing.
5. Are students prepared and encouraged to connect theory with lived experience?
6. What teaching formats allow for shared ownership of the learning space?

“Having experts by experience co-teach shifted classroom dynamics. Students asked deeper questions, and some stayed after class just to talk. That wouldn’t have happened before.” Educator

In the curriculum

To embed experiential knowledge across programs, it must be reflected in curriculum de sign — not just in isolated courses.
How to do it:

1. Develop a clear rationale for including experiential knowledge across the curriculum.
2. Involve curriculum developers and experts by experience in co-design processes.
3. Ensure continuity across years and modules, not just one-off sessions.

“We started small, with one course. Now, experiential knowledge is in our teaching strategy. It’s not a project anymore. It’s who we are.” Coordinator

Photo 28: When applause feels dirty - teacher

In institutional culture

Culture shapes what is possible. Institutions must foster a culture that genuinely values lived experience — not just in words, but in everyday practice.
How to do it:

1. Create visible roles and spaces for experts by experience on campus.
2. Promote a culture of openness, reflection, and attention to stigma and bias.
3. Recognize student experiences as valuable contributions to academic life.
4. Create spaces where students and staff feel safe to share vulnerabilities
5. Build long-term partnerships with civil society organizations and networks of experts by experience.
6. Invest in culture change, this requires institutional narratives, leadership support, and opportunities for staff to reflect, unlearn, and reimagine their roles.

In institutional policy

Policies and structures must reflect the institution's commitment to experiential knowledge.
How to do it:

1. Embed experiential knowledge in strategic plans, policy documents and your vision.
2. Formalize roles, hiring practices, and responsibilities
3. Institutionalize collaboration through long-term partnerships and contracts.
4. Provide clear frameworks and mandatory training for all involved.

Method: from pilot to policy roadmap

Goal: Translate successful practices into institutional policy.
Materials: Roadmap template.
Steps: 1. Document successful pilot practices.
2. Identify what needs to be formalized (roles, funding, training).
3. Create a timeline and advocacy strategy.

"Knowing that even state universities 'hire' [...] people with experiential qualifications, valuing it... [is a concrete sign of change]" Expert by experience

Photo 29: Complexity - researcher

In support structures

Support is essential for safe, meaningful participation—for students, educators, and experts by experience alike.
How to do it:

1. Offer tailored support, including supervision, feedback, and role clarity.
2. Create peer learning communities for educators and staff.
3. Ensure students have accessible pathways to engage with and reflect on experiential knowledge.
4. Ensure students know where to turn for support when engaging with emotionally complex content.
5. Bridge bottom-up and top-down efforts: Create feedback loops between students, experts by experience, educators, and decision-makers to sustain alignment and legitimacy.Document and evaluate progress: Gather evidence of impact through student feedback,
6. peer evaluation, and reflective documentation. Share success stories to influence institutional buy-in.

Photo 30: Embracing difference - expert by experience
Photo 31: Embracing difference - expert by experience

6.5 Conclusion

If we believe experiential knowledge is vital, then our institutions must reflect that belief — not just in words, but in structure. Symbolic gestures are not enough. We need job titles, budgets, policies, and long-term plans that anchor this work within the core of our educational systems. Structural change is not about temporary enthusiasm — it's about sustained integration. It That means building partnerships, securing resources, and embedding experiential knowledge into the everyday life of the institution.

6.6 Further reading

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Concluding thoughts

Embedding experiential knowledge in higher education is not just about improving pedagogy: it represents a deeper shift in how we understand knowledge, how we relate to one another, and how we engage with the institutional systems that shape learning. It invites us to question whose voices are heard, which stories are told, and how we can collectively create spaces where everyone feels a sense of belonging. Throughout the SEKEHE project, we have witnessed how co-teaching models, student support strategies, collaborative curriculum design, and institutional frameworks can transform not only what we do, but how we think, feel, and relate within educational contexts. These changes are cultural as much as they are practical.

This framework is not intended as a fixed model or prescriptive formula. Rather, it offers an open invitation to reflect, experiment, stumble, adapt, and grow. Each section is grounded in real experiences. It holds tensions and aspirations, lessons learned and questions still unfolding. As such, it is best understood as a starting point for ongoing dialogue and institutional learning. Our aspiration is that institutions will move beyond temporary inclusion models- where experiential knowledge is treated as an external or occasional contribution-and toward embedding it as a foundational dimension of academic life. Such a shift takes time, courage, and care. It calls for sustained investment in relationships, a reimagining of academic structures, and cultivating trust in lived experience as a legitimate and valuable form of knowledge. While the path forward is complex, it offers the potential to build more inclusive, responsive, and socially grounded educational environments.

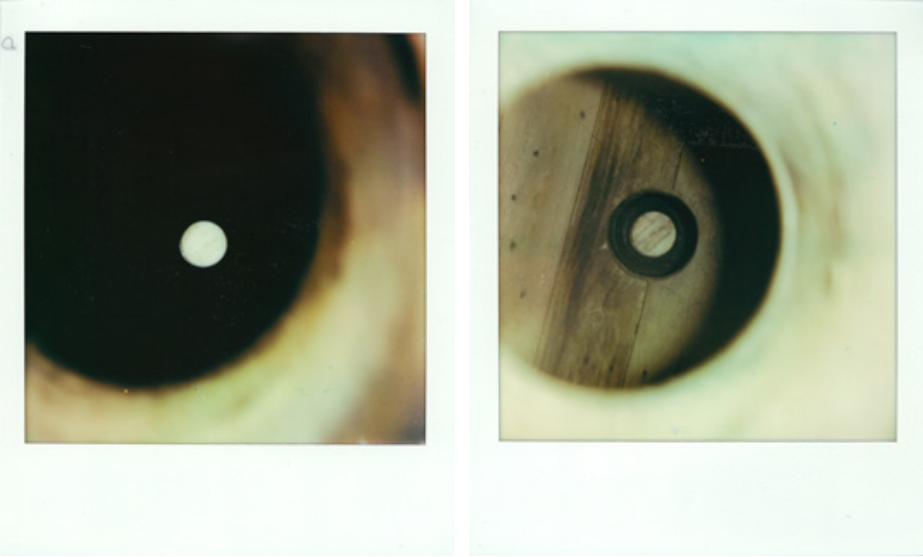

Photo 31: Light in the tunnel - expert by experience
Photo 32: Tunnel in the light - expert by experience

8 List of photos

SEHEKE
Methodological framework
Handbook part 1/4

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