

**Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences**

AMSTERDAM RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR SOCIETAL INNOVATION

## **THE OTHER PERSPECTIVE**

The story of an experiential expert at the  
Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences



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## COLOPHON

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## FOREWORD

I have been using the word *experiential expert/experiential expertise* actively for about four years now. Before that, I naïvely thought it was a pleonasm: everybody has living experiences, so everybody is an experiential expert. When our research group (now research group Outreach Work and Innovation) hired its first experiential expert four years ago, I had to get used to the term. Now their expertise goes without saying for me. What happened in those four years? It is all about two new insights.

The first insight is that social workers are masters at connecting and giving meaning to forces in social reality. They mediate between scientific knowledge about that social reality (incorporated in countless theories and concepts) and the knowledge that people (customers, clients, residents et cetera) have about their reality, as expressed in their thoughts, dreams and actions (hiding a multitude of realities and experiences). Social workers have put that knowledge into methodologies and rules of thumb for taking action. In the same way, social workers get involved with the knowledge held by administrators and politicians: they send them signals and respond to the frameworks imposed by these driving forces.

The second insight is that social workers are getting more and more help from experiential experts (and are in need of it, too) in order to make those connections and give meaning. They have the ability to not just approach that social reality in a scientific, administrative or professional way, but as ‘a matter of fact’; in other words, from their own experience of how life is lived and problems and ‘solutions’ are experienced. Experience has taught them how people can get into scientifically, administratively and professionally inconceivable dire straits, again and again. In their capacity as experiential experts they have learned (there is training for that, also offered by AUAS) to get out of the groove of their own experience and to help and facilitate others. Based on their own experience, they can relate to other people in different circumstances. They know (better than anyone) that recipes, models, concepts, theories, methodologies and language are representations of reality, which have been abstracted and reduced, and therefore never completely fit. That is why I sometimes hear them exclaim – also in my team: ‘that Emperor of yours is not wearing any clothes!’

In those four years, the most important thing I have learned is that such experiential knowledge is no rival to professional, administrative and scientific knowledge. Instead, it ferments and complements it. What the knowledge of an experiential expert consists of exactly and how this fermentation can be made to bear fruit, is a search I enjoyed participating in over the past four years, along with the other members of my team. Henrike came along for part of that journey. Along the way, she did what she is good at: she considered it carefully and then took the trouble to write something about how far we have come on this journey.

I wish you pleasant reading!

Martin Stam

*Professor of Outreach Work and Innovation*





## PREFACE

What is experiential expertise? Who are experiential experts? What is experiential knowledge? What is the added value of using experiential experts? What does working with experiential experts mean for teams and organisations? What are the preconditions for integrating experiential experts on an equal footing?

If you Google the Dutch word for experiential expertise ('ervaringsdeskundigheid'), you get about 78,600 results in 0.14 seconds. Click: scientific articles. About 920 results in 0.02 seconds. The concept has had its Dutch dictionary definition since 1999. We find 'experiential expertise' in various contexts, such as rehabilitation, mental health care, reintegration, dementia, poverty, autism, diabetes, education, social care, police and addiction care. Publications go back to 1998, and almost all research reports and documents deal with the same questions.

After a few links, it gets boring. The countless reports and documents about experiential expertise mainly differ in language and focus, but not in essence. New studies rarely reveal anything *new*. For example, one of the conclusions of the Dutch study 'Doorleefd Verstaan' ('Lived-through Understanding'), which focused on the relationship between scientific knowledge and experiential knowledge, is that experiential knowledge is comparable to scientific knowledge about the same object, and that both forms of knowledge are essentially complementary: they provide insight into the same 'object' (Kool, Bouman, Visse, 2013, p. 63).

The relation between science and experience has fascinated philosophers and scientists over the years. For example, Isaac Newton argued that many sciences, even chemistry and physics, draw heavily from experience. Kant phrased it as: *'Knowledge is arrived at through a combination of reason and experience. Knowledge cannot do without experience, because it would then be empty and without substance, as there is no innate knowledge. On the other hand, knowledge cannot do without reason either, for then man would never be able to adequately order and interpret the flow of experiences. Experience is therefore necessary, but it is still processed by the categories of the mind.'* (Rationalism, Wikipedia, Dutch entry, undated). In this way, he already made it clear 233 years ago that there is a distinction between (having) experience in general and experiential knowledge.

Every day, adults use the knowledge they acquired solely through experiences as children and over the years. Children do not read scientific theories before they get on a bicycle, for example. In general, they learn to ride a bike by trying, and along the way they discover certain patterns, such as maintaining balance in relation to speed. The advice parents give their children is based on their own experiential knowledge and not on scientific knowledge or, for instance, on this recent cycling formula (Goemans, 2010):

$$\begin{bmatrix} 80.8 & 2.3 \\ 2.3 & 0.28 \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \ddot{\phi} \\ \ddot{\delta} \end{bmatrix} + \left\{ v \begin{bmatrix} 0 & 33.9 \\ -0.85 & 1.69 \end{bmatrix} \right\} \begin{bmatrix} \dot{\phi} \\ \dot{\delta} \end{bmatrix} + \left\{ g \begin{bmatrix} -80.9 & -2.6 \\ -2.6 & -0.8 \end{bmatrix} + v^2 \begin{bmatrix} 0 & 76.6 \\ 0 & 2.65 \end{bmatrix} \right\} \begin{bmatrix} \phi \\ \delta \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} T_{\phi} \\ T_{\delta} \end{bmatrix}$$

Life is all about using and mobilising our experiential knowledge, except we mostly do it subconsciously. People only make their experiential knowledge (more) explicit when there is reason to do so, for instance when they have to or want to explain something to someone else.

When it comes to recent research in experiential knowledge, Marilyn Ferguson's 2006 observation that scientists only ask questions they probably already have the answers to does not seem to be too wide off the mark (p. 47). Maybe the time has come to ask and research different questions?

I have also noticed that, in spite of the wealth of documents about experiential expertise, ignorance still abounds. Experiential expertise is not a natural consequence of having experiences. For example, if you have experienced relationships, it does not mean that you are a relationship expert; just like the ability to paint does not make someone an art expert that can teach art or give workshops. Using certain experiences and knowledge professionally requires focused attention and reflection on one's own experiences and knowledge in relation to other people's experiences; experiential expertise transcends personal experience(s). What's more, the use of experiential expertise is mostly about using the coping experiences (Driessen et al, 2013) of people who are dealing or have dealt with specific and disruptive experiences; it is not about the problem itself. Acquiring experiential expertise requires various competencies and abilities, which is not done justice when people say that everyone has experiential expertise because everyone has experiences. The old-fashioned saying 'ignorance breeds contempt' might explain the reservations of some when it comes to experiential expertise, but an important aspect of experiential expertise is exactly the fact that it is given meaning by 'doing it', together with others.

Another factor that I think hampers integration, is the traditional way of working within organisations. In a systems world, the noise of hidden agendas dominates, like wanting to convince others and focusing on one's own interests and goals. People simply sharing personal thoughts, considerations and ideas, without it leading to a to-do list or a result, is not self-evident. The systems world consists of people (such as policymakers, politicians, scientists) who keep on emphasising differences and creating social groups. This feeds rifts between people, including the rift between experiential experts and professionals. A shame, because it leads to unnecessary tensions. Concepts such as experiential expertise, experiential knowledge, recovery and personal reality are not the prerogative of so-called (former) clients, vulnerable citizens, citizens in precarious situations or experiential experts. Empowerment and a sincere interest in others are essential in all relationships. Reciprocity does not require theories or frameworks, but our own humanity.

'But what does that have to do with me?', I can hear you thinking. A lot. Practice, research and education are inextricably intertwined: the celebrated triangle. Everybody who is or wants to be involved should familiarise themselves with what is going on throughout the field, and not be afraid to look at it critically. Criticism is not bad, but valuable. A colleague once told me that he appreciated critical feedback, because it shows that somebody really paid attention to his thinking. I see it as a sort of invitation to take up the challenge to learn and make the most of it. And I think it can help to remind each other, once we seem to have gotten a little lost, of questions that truly require attention and study. Such as: where do we want to go (individually, as a team, as an organisation)? What is our goal? To what extent does what we do in our research, training and the field genuinely contribute to achieving that goal? How can we support each other while accepting each other as we are? What can we learn from each other? And so on.

These are only a few examples of the many questions that staff members of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (AUAS) have tried to study over the past few years, to which the answers are not yet ready for archiving. Nonetheless, a lot has been learned and tangible progress has been made in the introduction of experiential knowledge in education. As part of the research institute Applied Social Sciences and Law, the research group 'Outreach Work and Innovation' at a certain point proposed to write a 'handreiking', a guide for the use of experiential expertise and experiential experts within higher professional education (HBO), as a source of inspiration to other schools which might be interested in taking advantage of experiential expertise for their courses or trainings. This document is the result. Except it is not called a guide.

In the online Dutch Encyclopaedia and in the four dictionaries that I consulted, a 'handreiking' is defined as: help, support or a gesture of goodwill, in order to make peace or find a compromise. Not only do I detect a slight sense of superiority in the description, it also does not quite fit the aspect of simple sharing between people that I mentioned earlier, without having any agenda. More importantly, it does not suit the idea behind the research group: teaching social workers to start from the reality and experience of people in vulnerable positions, in order to better adapt to their strengths, opportunities and dreams, and to accelerate, reinforce and ensure sustainability of the process by using experiential experts.

The concept cannot (yet) be found in dictionaries, but 'experiential story' seems a purer and more appropriate title, as this document is not about advising but about sharing the stories of people, about searches, experiences, conflicts, successes, awareness, progress as well as stagnation, and about inspiration.

Henrike Kowalk

*Experiential expert at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences*



# 1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of experiential expertise originated with the women's lib movement and the AA; and in the 60s, the psychiatric survivors movement took up the term, partly influenced by the anti-psychiatry movement. At first, the struggle was aimed at improving the legal position of clients, at participating in decisions about one's own treatment and one's own body, at having a say in how healthcare was organised. However, from the 90s onwards, the psychiatric survivors movement focused increasingly on independent, full citizenship. Clients developed expertise together, based on their own experiences and those of their fellow clients. Based on their own views on health care and the expertise they developed themselves, the psychiatric survivors movement also started to influence the quality of care itself (Plooy A. from: Driessen et al, 2013).

Due to the Dutch Social Support Act (Wmo) and New Style Welfare (Welzijn Nieuwe Stijl), the emphasis shifted from the social worker as 'problem solver' and someone who knows what is good for others, to the social worker as a facilitator. A person creating and maintaining the (pre-) conditions allowing both collective and individual processes of recovery and change to start. Social workers are expected to reach out and be generalists. That means to show initiative and approach people that they suspect are experiencing difficulties, and that they are familiar with various disciplines. They are also expected to actively sit back and focus on what someone can do instead of what they cannot do.

The reorganisation of the Social Support Act has led to further changes. After the decentralisation of the Exceptional Medical Expenses Act (AWBZ) and the introduction of the new Participation Act the division into target groups is no longer based on the familiar rules. The guideline 'Amsterdam Healthcare: Where Necessary' explains that so-called target groups will be classified less in terms of their disorder (old age; physical, mental or psychological impairments) and more in terms of self-reliance (Feber A. de, 2013). So it is no longer about a division based on the nature of the problem, but about the question to what extent someone is (still) functioning. For social workers, this means that they will have to be able to adapt to people with different problems and various ways of thinking, acting and expressing themselves. These people have all kinds of unique abilities and talents, but also different wishes and needs. Professionals are struggling to make this change. For example, working to support recovery in general requires another way of thinking about people with a chronic psychiatric disorder or a problematic addiction than is usual in healthcare and social work (Desain et al, 2013).

These changes to the professional profile and the changing target groups are two reasons why institutions are increasingly using experiential expertise as an additional source of knowledge. Experiential experts are regularly employed by mental health services, addiction care, social programs and the 'poverty movement', but also in general healthcare, education and other fields. More and more, the concept of experiential expertise is to be found in policy documents of mental health services, addiction care and social programs (Driessen et al, 2013). Among other things, experiential experts are asked to contribute ideas to developing projects, research and/or the implementation of policies. Or they act as interpreters or bridges in order to close the gap between clients and care services (Spiesschaert et al from: Driessen et al, 2013). Professionals have discovered that experiential experts, because of their different perspective, often notice things that would otherwise be missed. Aspects that are very important to both the care provider

and the person needing help. In early 2012, a professional organisation for experiential experts (VVvE) was founded, advocating the use of qualified experiential experts and recognition of their position and work.

Meanwhile, experiential expertise is becoming more and more common at AUAS as well. For a while now, the course Social Educational Care Work (SPH) has been offering the Pathway Experiential Expertise Training (TOED) and the GGZ Experiential Social Worker Training (GEO), two initiatives of the Institute for User Participation and Policy (IGPB) and the Client Representation Agency of Eindhoven's mental health services (GGZ), in collaboration with Fontys Hogeschool in Eindhoven. With TOED and GEO, experiential experts were increasingly involved at AUAS as guest lecturers. In 2009, the research group 'Outreach Work and Innovation', part of the research Institute of the AUAS faculty of Applied Social Sciences and Law, hired its first experiential expert, followed by a second in 2012. Experiential experts are structurally employed in some curricula of SPH, Social Work and Community Services (MWD) and Social Legal Services (SJD) departments, as well as in the Education and Development department, which organises courses, development and practical training.

The experiential experts getting involved in education are part of Team ED, a social employment agency for experiential experts. Team ED aims to provide training and peer review to experiential experts in order to develop their expertise. In 2013, AUAS hosted its first Masterclass for experiential experts; a collaboration between Team ED (previously called Makelpunt of Cliëntenbelang Amsterdam), patient representatives' group Zorgbelang Noord-Holland and AUAS. Organisations that have used Team ED's experiential experts so far are, among others, Puur Zuid, Sociale Loketten, Samen Doen-teams, Centram, Salvation Armies, ABC Alliantie and HvO Querido.

Developments in the field directly affect education, because that is where future care workers are being trained. If we want to adequately prepare students for their future work (field) as well as their role and position as care worker (facilitator), education should follow practice. This can only be done by including the knowledge, signals and experiences from the field in courses. With all these drastic and complex developments - the changing professional profile, AWBZ decentralisation, the introduction of the new Participation Act, the shifts in collaboration partners and colleagues, changes to target groups - we will have to critically reflect on the question how we can better prepare students for the field.

The dissatisfaction about care services has not disappeared. That means we will also have to keep thinking about issues such as: how can students learn to relate to people's realities and experiences, how can they learn to approach and support a human being as a human being, rather than taking everything out of their hands? How can they learn to translate the principle of relating to people into a collaboration with both other target groups, partners and experiential experts as colleagues? And as MWD (Social Work and Community Services) Department Manager Laura Koeter (2013) said so beautifully and so powerfully about education: 'How do you bring it to life? How do you make it real?'

## 2 EXPERIENTIAL EXPERTS IN HIGHER PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION AND IN THE FIELD

### 2.1 Experiences using experiential experts at AUAS

At the moment, experiential experts mostly function as guest lecturers and are used for role-play, to go out into the field with students and for assessments. Study programmes making structural use of experiential experts are:

- Minors: mental health services (GGZ) educational care worker, Outreach Work, Domestic and sexual violence
- Toolkits: Rehabilitation, Outreach Work
- SPH methodology 2<sup>nd</sup> year
- Diversity Cycle
- Study Counselling (SLB) 1<sup>st</sup> year SPH
- Seminar Compulsion and Coercion
- Modules: Child and Safety, Poverty, Independence, the Elderly

The two experiential experts employed by the Research Institute of Applied Social Sciences and Law are involved in:

- guest lectures AUAS
- trainings/workshops/education for regular care professionals
- Social Support Act (Wmo) workshops (area-specific and recovery-oriented research and implementation, development curriculum)
- organisation and developments regarding the use of experiential experts in education and in the field (collaboration AUAS and Team ED, contributing to the creation of preconditions for the use of experiential experts, trailblazing).

During guest lectures, experiential experts bring the practice they have experienced into the classroom. They share their (recovery) stories and together with the students, they reflect on important aspects, like how to approach someone. Stories from personal experience provide more insight into the realities of people with various problems and from various backgrounds, as well as into diverse intervention aspects, such as recovery support, than theoretical or scientific books or articles ever could. Students regularly say they appreciate being able to talk to someone who knows what it is like/how it feels to become a social services client. By having students get to know the person behind requested assistance/problems and showing them that people are so much more and can do so much more than others say, the use of experiential experts also counterbalances processes of stigmatisation. In the context of vision building, experiential experts use statements about people with specific problems, or they raise a subject in order to draw out any prejudices and explore these with students. According to students, practising methodologies in role-play with experiential experts feels 'more real' than practising with a training actor or fellow student. Field trips with experiential experts are seen as very educational by students, because they really enter that reality (digital questionnaire AUAS, 2013).

Students about the use of experiential experts as guest speakers and guest lecturers:

*'Many great examples from the field.'*

*'It is easier to link theory to practice. All methodologies and techniques can be translated into the use of experiential experts. What works and what doesn't.'*

*'Many (future) professionals work in and on behalf of an organisation, often they have no idea of clients' real motivations and concerns. An experiential expert can give a better idea of a client's experience.'*

*'I saw where homeless experiential experts could go/did go, which allowed me to better understand their reality. It is very impressive and it showed me that contact does not just have to be restricted to the office.'*

*'The stories and contributions of experiential experts give a good idea of a client's reality.'*

(Digital questionnaire AUAS, 2013)

Teachers also appreciate having experiential experts in their classes. One teacher said:

*'students and care professionals learn a lot of things from experiential experts that I cannot teach them.'* (Digital questionnaire AUAS, 2013)

## **2.2 Attention for experiential knowledge of students in study programmes**

During guest lectures with experiential experts, the experiential knowledge some students possess also comes up. They relate what they hear to their own experience(s). Students and teachers feel the need to give more attention to the experiences and experiential knowledge of students during training (assessments guest lectures, digital questionnaire AUAS, 2013).

*For the SPH study programme in Amsterdam, first-year students present themselves in relation to their future role socio-educational care worker for their portfolio for the subject Study Counselling. During these meetings, students regularly mention their own experiences with traumatic events, being diagnosed, receiving professional care or living with a vulnerability of whatever nature. In general, it does not go beyond these mentions. No opportunities are given to explore the meaning of these experiences for one's own life path, for the collaboration with fellow students nor for their future role as care professional. What remains is an 'unfinished process', that might leave both teachers and fellow students embarrassed or unable to act, which might lead students to conclude that it is best to remain silent in future. (Passavanti, 2013)*

This can cause students to lose touch with themselves (even more), which negatively impacts their ability to really connect with other people. I think people can only really connect with other people when they are truly in touch with themselves. In order to put yourself in the shoes of people in different circumstances and with different backgrounds, without passing judgement, you need to be aware of your own humanity and the complexity of your own experiences and feelings and to what extent they (can) affect choices and behaviour. For example, Irvin D. Yalom tells the story of how Erich Fromm in his classes on empathy often used an over 2000 year old quote by Terence: 'I am human, and think nothing human alien to me'. According to Yalom, Fromm encouraged people to open themselves up to that part of themselves that corresponds to what another person is sharing, regardless of whether it is painful, ridiculous or embarrassing. Fromm considered it important that people who find themselves unable to open up investigate why they have closed off a part of themselves (Fromm from: Yalom, 2002).



These thoughts correspond to what an experiential expert, while training as a social worker, wrote about how she managed to put the emphasis on being human (p. 62, 'Verborgen Schatten', 2010). She says that the hard part about listening with an open heart is that she will feel her emotions and it can sometimes be painful. She knows her emotions sometimes come through in her voice, but is convinced that hearing or seeing that she genuinely empathizes can have a healing effect on others. In her opinion, what is most important is that she continues to act professionally, meaning she is able to shut off her emotions off in order to enter into a dialogue.

A critical and valuable comment made by a teacher about the experiential expertise of students: *'Nothing wrong with using experiential expertise in education. But I would rather see the experiences of ALL students raised to an expert level in school rather than (to put it somewhat irreverently) flying in a mad man to illustrate. Everybody (including students) has their own story; using those is useful. The danger of experiential experts is that others have a problem and that professional care workers do not have problems but help others with problems. That cannot be the idea behind the training.'*

(Digital questionnaire AUAS, 2013)

Other training institutes have included experience-based learning and experiential knowledge in their curricula as a third source of knowledge, for example in Windesheim, sometimes in combination with a separate course group (Fontys, Saxion). What these higher professional education programmes have in common, is that they train socio-educational care workers, with a special focus on the experiential knowledge of their students (Haaster van et al from: Passavanti, 2013). It is about personal–professional development. In part based on the project plan 'Learning with Experience', in 2013 AUAS started a pilot of the course 'learning with experience' as part of the SPH curriculum. From the start, an experiential expert has been involved in the design of this module.

A teacher about the necessity to give (more) attention to students' experiences:

*'In our control focused society, in an evidence-based professional practice of products, protocols, instant solutions, there are fewer opportunities to develop trust and compassion. How can you relate, really listen, if there is no acknowledgement, recognition of one's own experiential knowledge? When shame, fear and blind spots predominate. Or aggression and arrogance. Our students are still young, but they will be entering a practice that is changing and complex. Creating awareness of the importance of their life experience for themselves, for others and for their role as care worker empowers them and gives them self-confidence. It should be used right from the first year.'*

(Personal conversation with teacher 2014)

However, having a curriculum that pays attention to students' experiences does not mean that experiential experts are no longer necessary in education. Exploratory research during the minor Domestic and sexual violence about students' experiential expertise and the way in which experiential expertise can be integrated, shows that contributing their own experiences does not appeal to all students. 65 students participated in this exploratory research. The majority of minor students (78%) indicated that they do not think a separate program for students with experiential expertise necessary. Most students (95%) said they would find it interesting to hear about the experiences of an experiential expert during the minor. Furthermore, a majority felt that students

with experiential knowledge should receive extra attention and support, for example through supervision groups (minor Domestic Violence AUAS, 2012).

### **2.3 Experiences using experiential experts in the field**

For the research group 'Outreach Work and Innovation', it is standard practice to use experiential experts for outhouse training and courses, for example trainings for Neighbourhood Teams and Working Together teams. The participants are people who have at some point trained as social workers and who have been working in the field for years, or people who have a lot of work experience and are now in part-time education. Without fail, the experiential experts in these trainings are deemed important and indispensable (Evaluations Training and Development, no date). So even for part-time students and people with a lot of work experience, the use of experiential expertise has added value.

### **2.4 Conclusion evaluations**

The use of experiential experts as guest lecturers and developing a separate curriculum for students with lived experiences satisfies the (different) needs of students. 100% of students and 75% of teachers participating in the digital questionnaire (2013) want experiential experts to be used more often at school, and in a structural way. Prior to this questionnaire, in 2012 Liesbeth Hovenkamp – initiator of the pilot 'learning with experience' – conducted many exploratory discussions with teachers about experiential expertise in schools. The answers she received at the time (literally) correspond to the responses to the questionnaire. Given the fact that the use of experiential experts is desired (judged by the positive response to the internal questionnaire, plus results from other research projects and training for care workers), we can conclude that within the social departments of AUAS there is great support for the use of experiential expertise and that it is definitely worthwhile to further explore the use of experiential expertise within an educational setting.

### **2.5 Vision on the use of experiential expertise in higher professional education and in the field**

A shift is taking place in society, which also requires a shift in education. A desire for change is expressed in many individual conversations with students and teachers, the digital questionnaire (2013) and meetings about educational and social issues. This desire is about the need for education that (once more) pays attention to participants and their experiential knowledge and in which students are taught to learn inductively and to develop the ability to act according to their own judgment. The premises of theories and methodologies are no longer key, but the day-to-day reality professionals are confronted with in their mission (Stam, 2013).

Using experiential experts in education, training and development programs in the field can contribute to achieve this desired shift. The experiences using experiential experts in an educational setting justify the conclusion that it is important to make them an integral part of trainings. From the first year, in different places and various ways and both part-time and full-time. The obvious choice is to enlarge the current supply of guest speakers, so that more students can benefit from the experiences and knowledge of experiential experts, and to continue to work

towards a separate curricular strand for students with lived experience. By presenting experiential expertise as a source of knowledge of equal value (in addition to professional and scientific knowledge), students will (hopefully) learn to better relate to experiential experts as colleagues.

## 3 FROM VISION TO REALITY

The conclusion drawn by the National Support Centre for the Use of Experiential Expertise (LIVE) is that introducing experiential expertise requires time and patience. Not only because it is a new way of working, but also because it requires a cultural change within the entire organisation (Van Erp, 2012). This chapter takes a look at the history and will explain in greater detail to what extent these two aspects play a role in developments at AUAS.

### 3.1 The path of the BIOS principle

Around 2000, an SPH teacher starts involving experiential experts at school. It was a year after the concept of experiential expertise had entered Dutch dictionaries and long before the welfare state started to change and experiential expertise some sort of a hype. Other teachers take up his initiative. Not everyone wants to use experiential experts and it is up to individual employees, the pioneers, to find and create opportunities for involving experiential experts. The Outreach Work and Innovation research group's decision to hire an experiential expert gives experiential expertise an official position within the Research Institute Applied Social Sciences and Law. So far, the collaboration between study programs and the Research Institute remains limited. Only teachers and scientists that are involved in a joint curriculum are aware of each other's initiatives. In social work, the focus shifts more and more to the collective, creating a movement at AUAS towards (more) collaboration. Study programs and the Research Institute seek each other out more deliberately and more often, in order to brainstorm about how training can correspond even more closely to developments in the field.

In his inaugural lecture 'the importance of uncertain knowledge' (2013), Martin Stam explores how changes and innovations can come about. In his opinion, innovating successfully comes down to one rule of thumb: let the development and implementation of the work happen bottom-up, but create top-down frameworks and support in order to make it possible. Working bottom-up is a consequence of the principle: adapting to the forces in people's realities and experience. Stam summarises this as the BIOS principle:

1. From the inside out rather than from the outside in (based more on realities and less on systems world).
  2. Inductive rather than deductive (not based on 'certain knowledge' but on 'uncertain knowledge').
  3. Bottom-up rather than top-down (design practices with room for experimentation, organisation and reflection by teams).
  4. Together rather than separately (participants to such practices recognise the importance of different kinds of expertise).
- (Studie Arena, 2014)

When we look at the developments surrounding the use of experiential experts at AUAS from the perspective of the BIOS principle, we discover the following similarities:

1. The use of experiential expertise in educational settings is being introduced from the inside out, not the outside in: teachers and scientists take people's needs and their own desire for change as a starting point for getting experiential experts involved.

2. They might do so based on their own convictions, but not based on certain knowledge. They are not afraid to try and to act on their own accord, as they see fit.
3. The use of experiential expertise is starting to become embedded in study programs from the bottom-up: AUAS staff members are spreading what is known about experiential expertise and use it in the field, but without any preconceived plan.
4. Staff members are looking for collaboration with colleagues within their own environment. Education, research and practice are seeking each other out more deliberately and more often, in order to deepen the underlying values and clarify shared goals through co-creation.

The most decisive factor for development at AUAS is that staff members 'just' started doing it and went down the path of experiential learning. 'Just doing it' does not mean acting without thinking or without preparation. It is about taking the plunge, even though no one yet knows exactly how to do it.

'Just doing it' means trying, experiencing it for yourself, acquiring experiential knowledge and developing based on this knowledge. It is comparable to the underlying concept of exposure, where the idea is that people expose themselves to things they would rather avoid, because of irrationally negative feelings, and then realise that it is not as bad as they have feared. According to scientists from different disciplines, such avoidance behaviour might be responsible for the way we think (Ferguson, 2006, p. 110), meaning it can prove useful at certain levels, such as working with experiential experts. AUAS staff members confirm that it is not talking about how it should be done that reduces any scepticism or discomfort, but rather repeated exposure. In other words: repeatedly 'just doing it'.

*'I was very sceptical about working with experiential experts, but by simply doing it I am noticing that it is a process for me and the experiential experts. And that it is a dynamic movement.'*  
(Teacher, personal conversation, 2013)

All in all, we can say that the process at AUAS has followed the rule of thumb for successful innovations, but that does not mean that we are already there. Neither is it a guarantee for a cultural change within the organisation or the desired shift within education. The number of staff members getting involved in the use of experiential experts at AUAS is growing, meaning complexity is increasing. On the one hand, that is to be welcomed, because this is how transformations are brought about. On the other hand, more and more and other interests, perspectives and desires have joined the discussion. This means we need to listen closely to each other, because a good collaboration between various parties requires a mutual understanding of the different functions, motives and interests (Veerman & Stam, 2009). Also, vigilance is becoming increasingly important, if we want the process to continue to develop bottom-up and experiential expertise not to be seen and treated as a property of the organisation. Because of the academic way in which experiential experts are sometimes discussed, people can lose sight of the fact that experiential expertise is not a product of science or education. Of course, we need to look at its quality critically, but the original heart of experiential expertise should remain key and it should be acknowledged as an equal and independent partner.

The way in which the developments at AUAS have been presented in the first part could give the misleading impression that AUAS staff members made it, but it is not as elegant as it looks. The next chapter will therefore zoom in more on the happenings behind the scenes.

## 4 CONSIDERATIONS AND CHALLENGES

### 4.1 Adapting to the realities in society

Some care workers consider experiential experts as incompetent colleagues or use the experiential expert for activities and roles that do not suit them (Desain et al, 2013). Experiential experts work from people's realities and represent the interests of people who need support. Professionals working with experiential experts need to be aware of this and need to be able to adapt to those realities. AUAS might not be a mental health institution or a social programme, but education institutes are also part of the field. The principle of adapting to people's realities is just as relevant when working with experiential experts in an educational or research setting.

The problem is that in the hustle and bustle of the daily routine educators often forget to also reflect on their own thoughts and actions and on what we should, could and want to learn in a partnership with experiential experts. The focus is mostly on what others should learn, so they can help others and are able to work together better. In personal conversations, staff members say they do feel the need for room to exchange ideas about what they have encountered. For example, one teacher/scientist would appreciate an occasional peer review or meeting in order to brainstorm with colleagues. She is curious to hear about others experiences and how they deal with certain situations. For instance, what do colleagues do when something unexpected happens in their contact with an experiential expert or when they cannot relate? She also says she sometimes gets the impression that people assume that everybody just knows how to do things, but that is not always the case. AUAS staff members struggle with the concept of adapting to people's realities just as professionals in the field do. This issue deserves more attention, for it is an essential part of successful innovation. 'From the inside out' also signifies the needs and experiences of staff members and the realities that exist within the system.

*'Why do we want experiential expertise if we do not also want to use it for our own learning and development?'*

(Teacher, personal conversation, 2012)

### 4.2 Guest speakers

In order to adequately use experiential experts in education, there has to be an awareness that experiential experts are not intended to replace teachers, but to contribute to improving training quality. We are therefore hesitant to label experiential experts 'guest lecturers'. Lecturing requires didactics skills, for one thing. Undoubtedly, some experiential experts will have such skills, but others not. Of course, didactics skills can be learned by those who want to, but the point is that experiential experts have a different role than teachers. Using the same term, even if only with the word 'guest' added, could cause confusion. Experiential experts might suddenly start acting as teachers, which would unfortunately detract from their added value. We think the term 'guest speaker' is more appropriate to the role experiential experts perform in education and can help manage expectations.

### 4.3 Experiences and considerations with regards to collaboration and embedding

The experiences at AUAS are generally positive, but not always. A number of teachers, for example, consider the diversity of guest speakers very valuable. However, others find it hard to cope with the fact that it makes a difference which experiential expert you get in class. It can also annoy or dissatisfy a teacher if a lesson does not go according to plan. Occasionally, this has led to the ‘competencies of experiential experts’ being questioned. In view of the fact that we want integration on an equal footing, this should automatically lead to questions about ‘competencies of academic staff’ when it comes to working with experiential experts. Our goal is quality education, not ‘fitting’ guest speakers to the existing system or creating a stereotypical experiential expert. At AUAS, this discussion has so far been nipped in the bud, because time and again the problem proved not to be (a lack of) competencies. Joint preparation and evaluation are decisive for how a class goes and for mutual satisfaction. Apart from clarifying expectations and lesson plans, people can clarify in advance what they need from each other in case something goes wrong or something unexpected happens. Conversations, evaluations and the questionnaire (2013) reveal that guest speakers with experiential expertise as well as academic staff think that preliminary and debriefing conversations are an absolute must. This also applies to teachers who have often worked with experiential experts.

*‘In general, I am discovering more and more how specific you have to be in what you are asking for, in what you want to do with such a guest speaker in your class. Sometimes people have an incredibly good story, but they might be feeling insecure that day and do nothing but ramble. Then I try to help by asking questions and having the group ask questions, but that is not very satisfying for anyone. In other words, I am learning more and more how important it is to prepare such a class together, to clearly agree on what you expect of the other and on who will do what.’*  
(‘Experienced’ teacher, personal conversation, 2014)

Conversations and the digital questionnaire (2013) revealed that the collaboration between teachers and experiential experts is felt to be good, in spite of moments of tension or differences in perception. Yet when experiential experts become a structural part of specific curricula more can be gained, for example via a tandem arrangement between teachers and experiential experts. The minor and toolkit ‘Outreach Work’ at AUAS is already organised in so-called tandems and so are all the workshops and trainings in the field that are organised by the research group of Outreach Work and Innovation. Psychiatric care provider GGzinGeest also applies the concept when training care workers.

The idea of using teachers and experiential experts in a tandem arrangement originates with the ‘Missing Link’ in Belgium, a project about poverty and social exclusion, where teachers and experiential experts together shape the learning process. In this way, scientific and theoretical knowledge is linked to the realities and experiences of people living in poverty. It adds an extra dimension to the course material and deepens it, which helps students (teachers and experiential experts) to be stronger in their field. Experiential experts seem to strengthen each other and each other’s position by working in a tandem. For teachers, scientists and experiential experts who work together but not in a ‘tandem’, regular meetings could be planned in the context of a shared process of learning and development.

In the digital questionnaire (2013) all teachers indicate that the goal of the lecture was achieved. There is more to be gained here as well by exploring how the use of experiential experts can be better embedded in the whole curriculum. The guest classes are still separate from the rest of the curriculum and teachers have indicated that they would like to see a follow-up and for stories of lived experiences to really be used to go deeper. For example, what exactly can future care workers learn from them? The ambition is that experiential experts' input is not just used as an illustration, but as a proper source of knowledge that students then have to work with (teacher, meeting vision paper, 2014). Staff members are currently looking into how experiential expertise can be embedded in the curriculum.

*'Stories of lived experience are not as effective as they could be with the way they are being embedded now, which is a shame, because it is asking a lot of people to open up like that to a class.'* (Teacher, personal conversation, 2014)

#### **4.4 Teachers' experiential knowledge**

By now, the desires and needs of AUAS staff members are no longer limited to using experiential experts as guest speakers. On top of the wish to give more attention to the lived experience of students, for example in a separate curriculum or in an elective, staff members also feel the need to work with experiential expertise during peer reviews. One teacher has now finished the training 'Experiential Expertise Resilience', a second teacher started it in September 2014. This training is for professionals who want to explore their lived experience as a source of knowledge and who want to develop it into experiential expertise that can be used in their work (GITP-PAO, nd).

*'The Experiential Expertise Training has given me a different perspective on my lived experience as a political activist, refugee and immigrant. I no longer consider these experiences to be just a burden, but also a source of growth and knowledge. I can use the knowledge I gain from them in my personal life, and in my work as a teacher and supervisor. It allows me to relate, understand and acknowledge. Over the past year, I have seen students, having been given more space to share their experiences with each other, becoming better able to draw lessons and strength from their lived experience that they can use as a care worker.'*

(Teacher, personal conversation, 2014)

One exciting subject is the experiential knowledge of teachers, which is increasingly a topic of discussion. Teachers indicate that their work with experiential experts has encouraged them to reflect on their teaching. After a guest lecture, one teacher said that it was an eye-opener to see how easily an experiential expert managed to get across a theoretical aspect, that he himself had been unable to. Some teachers are aware that the added value of using experiential knowledge is not just connected to experiential experts and students, but also to themselves.

At the final symposium for the RAAK project 'Who knows?!', a teacher said that during the study he had wondered to what extent he used his own experiences as a teacher. Another teacher said that doing the Experiential Expertise Training (TOED) had been an eye-opener for her. During that training, she started to also *feel* the theoretical and rational knowledge she had as a teacher. What helped her especially was experiencing how that connection works. For instance, that it is not about the experience itself, but about the emotional perception of it. It gave her a new



perspective on teaching, and she is now exploring how to use her experiential expertise professionally as a teacher. And she is not the only one. Another teacher, who shared a personal experience on the theme of 'personalising diagnoses' after a disparaging remark made by a student about a 'problem case', says:

*'The class felt I had become too personal towards the student and was not being fair. That was a shock, it made me both angry and insecure – could they be right, had I gone too far? At the same time, I thought it had been fine. What is interesting is that as a teacher you switch to a different role, for example that of fellow sufferer, and share a lived experience, which confuses the students: they become angry and call you unprofessional. Several students could not handle this role reversal and insisted teachers should not 'use' a personal experience. I did realise at the time that I had no 'expertise' in that role. Now, years later and with hindsight, I think I should have made the fact that I was right the subject of the next lecture: raise the different perspectives and roles, and address the need for dichotomy.'*

(Teacher, personal conversation, 2014)

The use of teachers' experiential knowledge is a sensitive issue because it goes against the traditional image of a teacher's role. In general, teachers' personal experiences do not belong in the classroom. Professional distance does not just characterise social work, it also characterises the relationship between teachers and students. However, teachers are not just providers of information, they are also role models and human beings. A key dilemma of social work is the relation between distance and proximity. How can teachers bring humanity and equality across when these 'proximity' aspects are supposed to stay out of their teaching? The transition from the idea of professional distance to professional proximity will remain a challenge and require patience.

*'Experiential knowledge is not about bandying about your own stories at every opportunity, but about discovering the infinite diversity of experiences and realising that there is no such thing as knowing for sure. In order to create room for being unprejudiced, for 'slow questions, and for reciprocity. Let us allow ourselves that as well and in doing so, set an example for students.'*

(Teacher, personal conversation, 2014)

## 5 IN CONCLUSION: FLIP-THINKING AND VISION AS MOTIVATORS

So far about the experiences of AUAS staff members. But how to end a story that is not finished yet? Documents about developments often close with a list of future plans and activities, but I will not be doing that. I think it is more important to accentuate a few essential and overarching aspects again at the closing: the attitudes and forces that are at the basis of sustainable change and innovation.

### 5.1 Flip-thinking strategy

The preceding considerations may have made it clearer that the situation within an educational institution is not substantially different from the situations in organisations in the field. The three dichotomies illustrated by Stam (2013) in 'The Importance of Uncertain Knowledge', which he says all social workers are confronted with, also play a part in the academic world. These three dichotomies amount to: 1. systems world versus perceived reality, 2. top-down versus bottom-up development, and 3. inductive versus deductive learning. The question of how to deal with it is not easily answered; every organisation/institution and team will have to explore this for themselves. In the end, it might all come down to applying Gunster's flip-thinking principle (2008): 1. Turn problems into facts. 2. Turn facts into opportunities. It is certainly not always easy to approach problems in this way, but it can prevent people from getting lost in frustrations or focusing on the wrong things. Also, flip-thinking is necessary if you do not want to run out of breath.

### 5.2 Joint forces

Since working as an experiential expert, I have found it intriguing to notice that even just mentioning the simple concept of experiential expertise in general provokes a response in people. That was true four years ago and it still is. With regards to the complex developments at AUAS, it is clear that the use of experiential expertise in the long-term can definitely contribute to achieve a fundamental change. That is only possible thanks to the drive and strength of mind of AUAS staff members. Experiential expertise in and of itself does not transform anything. It comes down to how people perceive it and how they (want to) use it or not. I like to compare it with reaching out a hand to someone in need. Even though such a moment will definitely be a turning point for some, it is not the gesture itself that brings about substantial change in or for someone, especially not in the long term. In the end, that is up to the decisions and choices of that particular person, starting with considering if change is even their wish or their goal.

In 'De lerende organisatie: actueel of achterhaald?' (the learning organization: topical or obsolete?) van Rossum (2011) describes the characteristics of a learning organisation. In her reflections, she refers to Senge's idea (1994) that doers, deciders, thinkers and reflectors are needed to collectively set change in motion and to keep continual change going (p. 11). From a helicopter view, that is what we see at AUAS: a small but growing network of doers, deciders, thinkers and reflectors who work on changes in different places and ways and at different levels, as well as research what the deal is with 'fancy' words like equality, empowerment and

reciprocity. Key is that staff members and experiential experts act in concert as best persons, trailblazers, outreach workers and critical friends, and they do not get disheartened when the going gets tough. Given that collaborations with experiential experts do not always work this way elsewhere, it seems that a certain attitude and vision make a huge difference. But how do you develop vision and how do you work from a vision?

### 5.3 Working from a vision

The literature and consulting agencies offer many ideas about vision. The Dutch website *visie-strategie.nl*, for one, explains the difference between mission, vision and goals: vision is about looking at the now and future opportunities. According to Ferguson (2006), vision is directed imagination; it is not a goal, but a goal-setting mechanism. So vision is not something that just occurs from one day to the next or something that can be (en)forced. Rather, it grows by repeatedly focusing on what is and what should be. Ferguson (2006) also says that working from a vision means being active but not manipulative. It requires an attitude that fundamentally shares a number of characteristics with recovery support. For example, recovery support is about having an attitude of hope and optimism, being present, recognising and encouraging the use of one's own strengths, both individually and collectively, and working towards increasing one's control (Boevink et al from: Driessen et al, 2013). Driessen et al also say that recovery cannot be taken over from the person concerned, but the recovery process can be facilitated and encouraged. These ideas correspond exactly to the nature of acting agogically : intervening, supporting, facilitating et cetera in such a way that the best possible result in a social dimension, or what is considered as such, is actually realised. The intervention is always such that the individuals involved, together with others, make their situation what they think it should be, within the limits of their individual and contextual possibilities (Sector Council Higher Social Agogic Education, 2008). Working from a vision therefore also means acting in a way that supports recovery. As a matter of fact, this illustrates how small the differences are and that it is impossible to draw clear lines between certain concepts and specific groups of people or environments.

The most challenging aspect of the vision of AUAS staff members is creating synergy between training, research and practice. That will require a great deal of patience, as well as dedication to the fourth aspect of the BIOS principle: together rather than separately; that is, the professionals and their 'clients' who see themselves and each other, together with staff and management, as part of the necessary changes. In that way, they can create flexible, supportive frameworks for the transition from exclusive to inclusive responsibility. After all, co-creation is built on the principle: if you are not part of the problem, you cannot be part of the solution (Kahane from: Stam, 2013). Behind the scenes at AUAS, people said that they would also like to involve the experiential and informal perspective at a policy level. Will that ever happen? Only time will tell.

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## THE OTHER PERSPECTIVE

### The story of an experiential expert at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences

The concept of experiential expertise originated with the women's lib movement and Alcoholics Anonymous and in the 60s the psychiatric survivors movement took up the term, influenced by the anti-psychiatry movement. These days, experiential experts are more and more involved in the fields of social work, mental health services, addiction care, social programs and, over the last few years, in higher education as well.

In 2009, the research group 'Outreach Work and Innovation' at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences hired its first experiential expert and by now, AUAS has two experiential experts on its staff, making it unique in the Netherlands. Experiential experts are also involved in the study programmes Social Educational Care Work (SPH), Social Work and Community Services (MWD) and Social Legal Services (SJD). As guest speakers, they bring their practical experience into the classroom. They share their (recovery) story and together with the students they reflect on important aspects, such as how to approach someone. Stories from personal experience provide more insight into the reality of people with various problems and from various backgrounds, as well as into diverse aspects of intervention, such as recovery support. Students experience what it is like to talk to someone who knows what it feels like to receive organised care.

In this essay, experiential expert Henrike Kowalk reflects on the teaching practice at the aforementioned study programmes and on her role as a staff member of the research group 'Outreach Work and Innovation'. She describes how teachers and students struggle with the concept of adapting to people's realities. Conversations and a questionnaire indicate that the collaboration between teachers and experiential experts is considered valuable, in spite of moments of tension. Kowalk argues for a tandem arrangement between teachers and experiential experts so that even more can be gained from specific curricula.

The introduction of experiential experts in education also invites teachers and students to contribute their own experiential knowledge. The question now is: how can students work even more actively on their own experiences as a source of their development?