

Best Practice in Teaching and Learning of F.O.K.U.S., Bremen, Germany

1. What is your definition of experienced based learning?

What is its approach in respect of experienced based learning?

In the EX-IN course the participants reflect their experiences, which make them available as knowledge, and then share this knowledge with another, which enables each participant to extend his knowledge from experience with that from the others (collective knowledge from experience).

Philosophy des Curriculumms

Mental Health is a broad concept, which is based upon the wellbeing of all people in a community. Mental Health is a part of our daily life, which concerns every area of our private and social life, and as such she can be understood as a means to judge the personal situation.

Mental Health is also closely associated with phases and events that shaked our life, or even turned it upside down completely, in which the circumstances require that we think a lot about and come to terms with our need for stability and wellbeing; and in which psychiatric help sometimes appears appropriate.

At such a time we need competent people, who not only take an interest in the special situation, the distinguishing experiences, but also in the influence which the "illness" has on one's health in terms of identity, relationships, possibilities and expectations. This means that the experiences and hope of the user of psychiatric services are the key-element to the definition of the tasks and the organisation of the healthsystem.

As such the question of mental health is especially important to people who use psychiatric services and whose life is influenced by it. People with psychiatric experiences frequently dispose about a large amount of knowledge about themselves and about others, who made similar experiences, and also about which psychiatric services were more and lwhich were less helpfull. From this a special expertise develops:

"An "Expert by experience" in the health system is someone who has made aktiv experience with illness, disability, and/or psychiatric problems and who has acquired specific competences , to live with this illness, disability and/or psychiatric problems and can handle the socio-cultural and institutional context in which the illness, disability and/or psychiatric problems are meaningful." (van Haaster, Koster 2005)

The main concern in the participation of "Experts by experience" is the use of the individual experience as a resource. In order to do so the persons concerned must be able to reflect their experiences and the way they coped with them. This includes the willingness and ability to discuss their experiences with others as part of the reflection-process in order to avoid a point of view based solely on the own individual experiences, values and assumptions.

"...to become an Expert by experience, it is necessary, to reflect the own experiences and share these with others, who have made similar experiences. It is necessary, that the experts check and test their experiences in the comparison with

other experiences , other situations and other people."

Educational Philosophy

To avoid the mere reproduction of traditional knowledge and known explications, the project clearly has the task to develop a course which builds upon individual experiences.

The first step is to take the individual experiences of the participants as a starting point. Through the reflection and structuring of these experiences the participant can develop an experience-based "I-knowledge".

When we assume, that it is necessary to develop a shared perspective about what attitudes, methods and structures are helpful when supporting people who are in a psychiatric crises, then is it important that the participants discuss their experiences with each other, in order to develop a "We-knowledge". This way the experience of special psychic processes and psychiatric crises can be understood on an individual as well as a collective level.

Next to this approach it is important, that the EX-IN course encourages the development of abilities, knowledge and the application of methods. In the transfer of knowledge it is important, to reflect the theory on the base of experience. E.g. if someone would like to work as a teacher, it is important, that he or she knows, which contents and methods support a process in which people learn to understand the perspective of people with psychiatric experience. The EX-IN-Curriculum should strengthen the influence of people with psychiatric experience, their knowledge and their abilities on the psychiatric service-system (Topor, 2001). It should contribute to a better user- and recovery orientation and less discrimination in the psychiatry.

The project should also make a contribution to the improvement of the status of people with psychiatric experiences. We hope that the recognition of the course leads to improved possibilities of occupation and an appropriate payment of people with psychiatric experiences.

2. What do / would you call your best practice?

EX-IN

3. Please write a brief summary of your best practice.

EX-IN is a course with 12 modules which qualifies people with experiences of crises and the mental health system for work (peer-counseling, peer-support, and trainer). In the course the participants reflect their experiences, which make them available as knowledge, and then share this knowledge with another, which enables each participant to extent his knowledge through experience with that from the others (collective knowledge through experience).

4. When did you start it?

The curriculum for the course was developed between 2005 and 2007. The first courses started in 2006.

What were the reasons / motives to introduce and continue your best practice?

The project was based upon the conviction, that people, who have lived through one or more psychiatric crisis, can use these experiences to understand and support other persons in a similar situation.

Psychiatry is frequently marked by a solely medical understanding psychiatric disorders and a medically focused treatment with psychological and social elements. Good psychiatric praxis is more and more defined by evidence-based treatment.

However there are a lot of aspects, which support people in their recovery process, which an evidence-based care system doesn't take into consideration and many users are dissatisfied with the services offered. Those concerned use many different social and individual resources when trying to get well again. In the science of Psychiatry science many of these are certainly considered as not evidence-based, but outside this particular field scientific acknowledgement exists, especially in fields which include experience based knowledge.

People who have lived through psychiatric crises and use psychiatric services have an extensive knowledge about supporting attitudes, methods and structures, which is hardly being noted by the traditional care system.

Many studies (Davidson, Chinman, Sells, Rowe (2006); Hardimann, E.R.; Matthew, T.T.; Hodges, J.Q. (2005); Felton, C.J.; Statsny, P.; Shern, D.L. u.a. (1995)) proof , that the participation of people with psychiatric experience in psychiatric services contributes to more empowerment, a better development of social networks, more social activities, more responsibility being taken over, greater potentials for coping and problemsolving and more hope

The services offered become more flexible , offer a greater variety and hold concrete, practical information which is more recovery-orientated (Davidson, Chinman, Sells, Rowe 2005; Hardiman, Theriot, Hodges 2005). The participation of persons with psychiatric experience enables a better understanding of the processes and the experience of psychiatric disorders and leads to new knowledge about recovery-processes. The participation of persons with psychiatric experience also has the potential, to improve the contents and structures in the education of psychiatric professionals and to lead to a better perception of the needs of the users of psychiatric services.

What was your starting situation?

EX-IN was developed as an European project. In the countries participating in the project a variety of developments showed die increasing importance of the participation of people with psychiatric experience. People with psychiatric experience were having more and more work possibilities as a recovery-companion or teacher. One problem was, that because there were no structured qualification measures, the persons concerned didn't have a recognized status. The curriculum which was to be developed aimed to strengthen the participation of people with psychiatric experience and to provide a base for a suitable employment. Therefore the main focus in the course had to be on the reflection of participants own experiences and the acquisition of abilities and knowledge, which enable the delivery of qualified work based on the perspective of experience. However, it was deemed necessary that to ensure something lasting, also more research would be done on knowledge through experience and the coping strategies of people with psychiatric experience so that the organizations of the people concerned may be strengthened and the work done by people with psychiatric experience, the quality of education and the institutional framework conditions under which they work may be judged.

International

The World Health Organization (WHO) advocates and supports the participation of people with psychiatric experiences, as individuals as well as through organizations of those concerned, e.g. in the context of the development of a global forum for community Mental Health. Modeled on the European minister conference 2005 the WHO presented a regional paper in which they stated:

Involving service users and their families is an important part of the mental health reform process. The mental health system exists for people with mental disorders and their families, and they can and should make important contributions to defining what works and how the mental health system can be improved. The evidence also demonstrates that the active involvement of people with mental disorders and their families improves the quality of services and care provided. They should also be actively involved in the development and delivery of education, to give mental health workers a better understanding of their needs. (WHO, 2005:107-108)

The support the EX-IN-project received from the European Union is a clear sign, that this process should be pushed. Crucial factors were the continuing expansion of the influence of people with psychiatric experience as a service provider and as a trainer, not only of professional people, but also of other people with psychiatric experience.

National

In Germany the law was changed in January 2004 in order to lay down formal participation of patients in the Health System. Patient organizations take part in the decision-making process of joint federal committee without having the right to vote. Besides this there were many regional Agreements about the participation of people with psychiatric experience in the service system.

There were no official standards zu user participation, but in more and more areas the perspectives of people with psychiatric experience and their organizations were gaining importance. There had been an increase in experience-led projects, services and educational offers.

F.O.K.U.S. – EXPA

At F.O.K.U.S. the EXPA (EXpert PArtnership) exists since 2002. The EXPA is a competence pool in which people with mental health problems, their relatives and those working in the field of mental health unite together. Its goal is to improve the exchange between the people with mental health problems and those treating them and to raise awareness about the expertise in the handling of mental health crises and illnesses gained by lived-through experience. Politically they want to change the structure of the mental health system and the conditions under which treatment takes place. The EXPA as a contact body takes on work assignments which are then divided among its members. In the early years work assignments were rarer and existed mainly of lectures.

5. Please describe your Best Practice

Which learning goal/targets does your best practice have?

- To offer the possibility, to develop and recognize the knowledge by experience which the course-participants have in scientific context.
- The improvement of psychiatric services in terms of a the support being more focused on the health and recovery of the people who use the services on offer.
- To create the possibility, that people with different experience backgrounds can participate in an educational program. This enables collective learning from experience. To give the experiences a meaning and to put them into reference to the experiences of

other people is the basis on which a substantial role in the psychiatric services and in the associated training programs can be taken on.

- To prepare the participants to pass on their experiences to others in different roles, whether in the work with individual persons, in teamwork, in the development of organizations, in research, in education and in the promotion of mental health.
- To further the participation of people with psychiatric experience in the mental health sector and the establishment of possibilities to test and extend the significance of such structures in the praxis
- To keep the awareness alive, that life is a continuing learning process and to prepare the participants for the continuation of their personal development after the end of the course.
- To encourage the personal development of the participants in a positive, appreciative, anti-discriminatory, person-centered way.

Which teaching and learning strategies do you use?

The applied strategies mirror the philosophy of the educational program. The acknowledgement of the individuality the learners and with it the diversity of learning stiles which are present in each group of learners, leads to a variety of teach and learning strategies, which take the needs of the individual learner into account.

One of the main concerns in the organization of the course is to put die experiences of the participants in the center of every module. The participants dispose of multitude of experiences with regards to mental health. These experiences are in the course of inestimable value for the development of the own expertise, which is why specific strategies are used to include these experiences in the learning process.

The participants should search themselves a personal mentor, who has enough experience to support them during the course.

During the whole duration of the course the trainer can be addressed, but the mutual support under the participants is equally important.

During the course a great many of different teach- and learn-methods are being used.

The foundation for all the modules is the reflection of the own experiences. The modules consist of less formal sessions in which center on new learning processes and more formal presentations in which specific contents are conveyed.

Presentations by the participants themselves are considered to be a necessary part of the personal development.

As part of the course, participants – with the assistance of their tutors - are also expected to organize projects themselves. Innovative thoughts and ideas are being supported, as well as a more differentiated examination and an exploration of theoretical perspectives encouraged.

In order to promote independent learning the trainers will have information available to further literature and learning materials.

Special attention is being given to group processes. In order to use them as a place of learning it is necessary to ensure that they take place under secure conditions, in which confidential relationships can be build, in which die participants can feel free to express themselves and in which feedback can be given and received in a constructive, agreed upon form and way.

The learn and teach atmosphere comprises ethic principles, which are among others: all participants should have the same possibilities to learn; the possibility to make constructive experiences; respectful handling of different opinions. The trainers as well as the participants have the duty to be discrete about the personal information of the others.

The trainer course, which was also developed in the EX-IN-Project, invites the trainers to promote the development of knowledge rather than to convey it. The EX-IN-Course is a learning process for the trainers and the participants.

The portfolio assists the participants to discover their personal qualities, who they are and what they want to achieve with the course. The portfolio offers a good overall view of the capabilities and competences. The participants are invited to describe them by answering specific questions. If someone wants to engage himself in the interest of people with mental health problems, if he or she wants to work as an advocate, as a researcher, or in Education, it is important to know where the own qualities lie and what one wants to achieve. That portfolio also contains a personal action plan for the further development of oneself.

Which (learning or teaching) methods are used?

Exchange of experiences in pair- & group work (small groups, larger groups, plenum) with and without presentations, brainstorming, mind map, PowerPoint presentations (also interactive), role playing, interviews, impulse lectures from guests, platform discussions, Flipchart and moderation cards, clips out of films, texts, cards with sayings, exercises out of the systemic therapy, exercises with manual tools, placements.

Which themes are addressed?

In the ground course the participants reflect and mutually share their experiences with regards to following themes:

1. salutogenese,
2. empowerment,
3. exclusion and participation,
4. recovery
5. trialogue

In the upper course the focus shifts a little, and as well as reflecting and sharing their experiences the students are given tools which help them to put their knowledge of shared experience into practice. The themes of the modules in the upper course are:

6. (peer)advocacy,
7. self-exploration,
8. assessment,
9. counseling and supporting,
10. crises management,
11. learning and teaching,
12. final presentations.

What requirements do the participants have to fulfill?

To be allowed to start the EX-IN course, participants (officially) must

- have lived through psychological crises
 - have been an active participant in self-help, user or expert groups or in trialogue seminars
- or
- be in a situation in which the knowledge gained in the EX-IN-course can be applied in praxis

- be able to reflect his own experiences
- be able to share experiences
- have attained a certain level of self-determination
- not be in a acute crises

To get the certificate at the end, participants also have to

- do two placements. One in the ground course (minimum 40 hours) and one in the upper course (minimum 80 hours).
- make a portfolio in which they reflect their past experiences, take stock of their present resources, interests and needs / limits, and make a plan for the future.
- hold a presentation in the finishing module.

What standards does your best practice have?

- Every module must be led by a trainer team which consists of at least two trainers, one with a professional background and one who is an expert by experience. Both have taken part in an EX-IN Train the Trainer course.
- To ensure a broad spectrum of experience there must be at least 15 participants, there is no official maximum, but 20-22 persons is regarded as the upper limit.
- EX-IN Deutschland e.V. validates all courses which fulfill the quality standards and issues the certificates for the participants of these courses.

6. What did you learn from your experiences with your best practice?

- The courses benefit the participants personally as well, but as the focus of the course is on qualifying people for work, not everyone who could benefit personally is able and willing to take part in the course.
- Learning through the sharing of experience is possible and makes the participants to "teachers" as well as learners. This strengthens self-confidence and increases the feeling of self-worth.
- It's important to ensure peer-participation at all stages and levels in the development of the project as well as when it is put into practice.
- It is important to have and control quality standards right from the start.
- Local partners and possibilities of financing the courses are important issues which one should start to address at an early stage.

What are the outcomes of your best practice?

Ex-In courses are now widely established in Germany.

After the first EX-IN-Courses, the EXPA expanded and received more work assignments as before. Since then the amount of graduates which has found a job has increased slowly but steadily. Many others have profited from it in their personal development.

The worth of "knowledge from lived through experience" is more generally accepted and its value has increased.

7. How might these experiences be useful to the Empowerment College?

- In determining the target group.
- In choosing the contents and methods of the modules (some themes are the same or very similar).
- When considering quality-standards and their implementation.

- When looking for partners and ways to finance the Empowerment Colleges.

8. Is there anything else that is important in this context?

With EX-IN we not only gathered experience with developing and implementing a service offer of Rehabilitation through Education, we also gathered experience with experienced based knowledge and which conditions are necessary in order for it to develop.

9. List of Research and Literature in connection with the project:

Jahnke, Bettina: Vom Ich-Wissen zum Wir-Wissen: Mit EX-IN zum Genesungsbegleiter Neumünster: Die Brücke Neumünster 2012.

Jahnke, Bettina: EX-IN Kulturlandschaften. 12 Gespräche zur Frage: Wie gelingt Inklusion? (Neumünster: Paranus Verlag 2014.

Utschakowski, Jörg: Mit Peers arbeiten – Leitfaden für die Beschäftigung von Experten aus Erfahrung. Köln: Psychiatrie Verlag 2015.

Utschakowski, Jörg, Gyöngyver Sielaff and Thomas Bock, Thomas (Hg.): Vom Erfahrenen zum Experten: Wie Peers die Psychiatrie verändern. Köln: Psychiatrie Verlag 2009.

Utschakowski, Jörg, Gyöngyvér Sielaff, Thomas Bock, Andréa_Winter (Hg.): Experten aus Erfahrung - Peerarbeit in der Psychiatrie. Köln: Psychiatrie Verlag 2016.

Wer, wenn nicht wir? Erfahrene verändern die Psychiatrie. Deutschland, Dokumentarfilm von Jürgen J. Köster, DVD.

WHO IF NOT US! Improvement in mental health by experienced involvement. Germany, documentation by Jürgen J. Köster, copyright by ciné-ci films, J.J. Koester, DVD.