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## Conference “Philosophy and Politics of Care”

May 16-17, 2024

University of Verona

# Learning to care for education in mental health through the contribution of "Experts by Experience"

Qualitative Study within the SEKEHE project at the  
University of Milano Bicocca

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University of Milano-Bicocca



# Higher Education Role in Promoting Mental Health

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- **Educational professionals** play a **pivotal role** in providing **mental health care** within their communities.
- **The University** assumes a significant **ethical** and **political responsibility** in **training education professionals**.
- This responsibility entails fostering **new visions** and **educational practices** aimed at **promoting** dimensions of **recovery** and **empowerment** in everyday life (also through University life), aspects often overlooked but crucial for comprehensive mental health care.

## Erasmus+ SEKEHE

“Structural embedding of knowledge by experience in higher education through processes of co-creation”  
(KA220-HED-3213A5AC) (2022-2025)

The project aims to **structurally incorporate the «knowledge through experience»** gained from **experiences of distress into higher education** in social and educational studies, and to promote inclusion and diversity in the field of education



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# For these purposes...

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Within the SEKEHE project, the **University of Milano-Bicocca (Department of Human Sciences for Education)**:

1. **Involved two Experts by Experience (EBEs) in mental health** from the CoopLotta Cooperative (Lombardy, Italy).
2. The EBEs actively **participated in the co-design and co-teaching** of specific lessons **within the "Pedagogy of Social Inclusion" course**.
3. The collaboration occurred **during the third year of the Bachelor's Degree program in Educational Sciences**, academic year **2022/2023**.

# **Starting point:** The Value of EBEs Experience in University Education

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Studies highlight **positive outcomes of involving** EBEs in mental health in university teaching

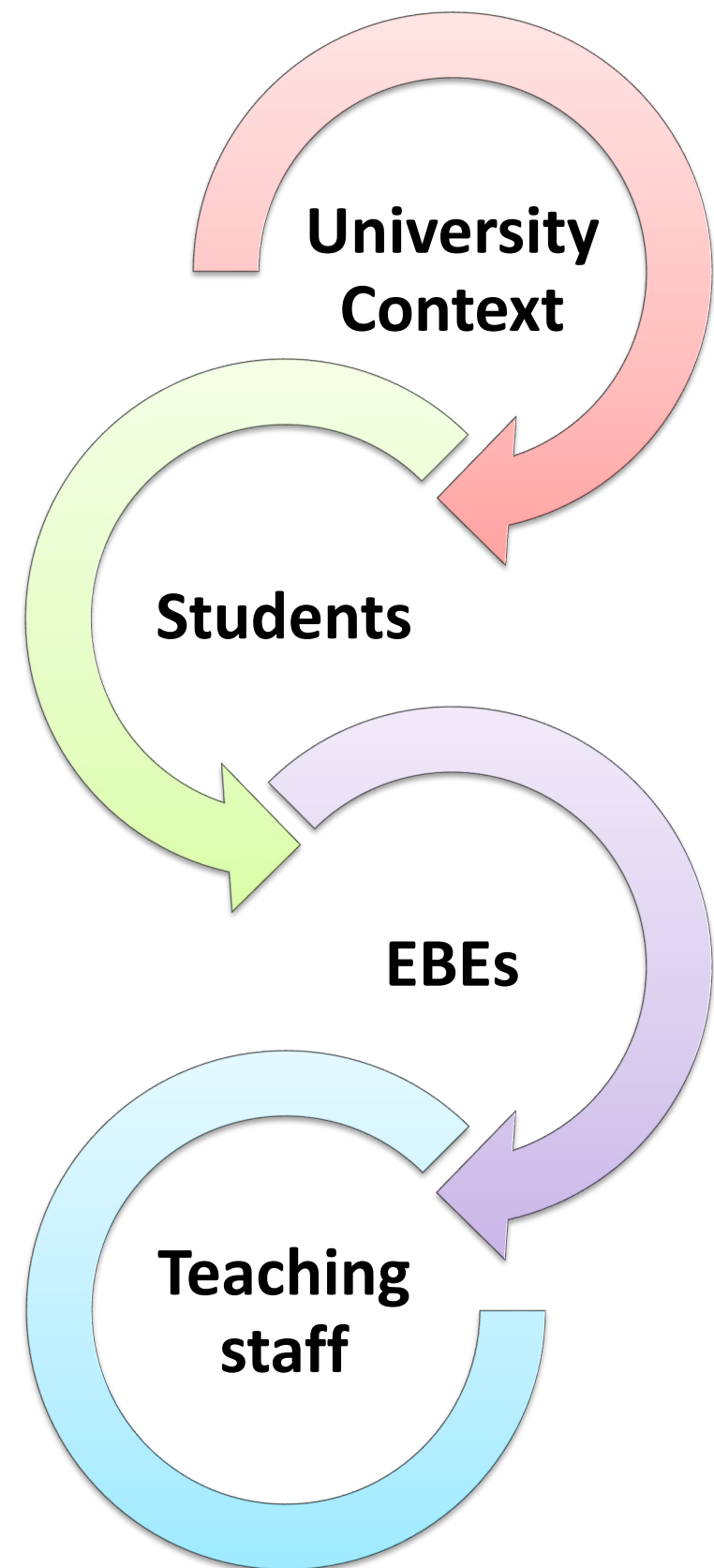
## **Currently:**

**Limited opportunities for EBEs** to participate in university teaching → **Sharing one's own illness story** rather than involvement in the educational process.

## **UNIMIB SEKEHE Innovation:**

Establishing **a collaborative partnership** between **EBEs** (as remunerated contributors), **professors**, and **university authorities** to enhance the perspective of experiential knowledge in the courses.

# What is the overall impression and experiences of stakeholders regarding their involvement in the SEKEHE project?



**2 employees** from the University's Accounting and Administration Office who managed the entire selection process of EBEs for the SEKEHE project

Individual semi-structured interviews

**4 students** attending the course on Pedagogy of Social Inclusion, co-designed and co-taught by 2 EBEs

Focus group + **Photovoice**

**2 EBEs** involved in the SEKEHE project, co-designing and co-teaching lessons within the course on Pedagogy of Social Inclusion

Individual semi-structured interviews + **Photovoice**

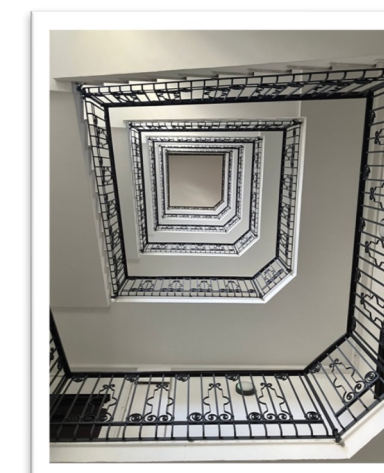
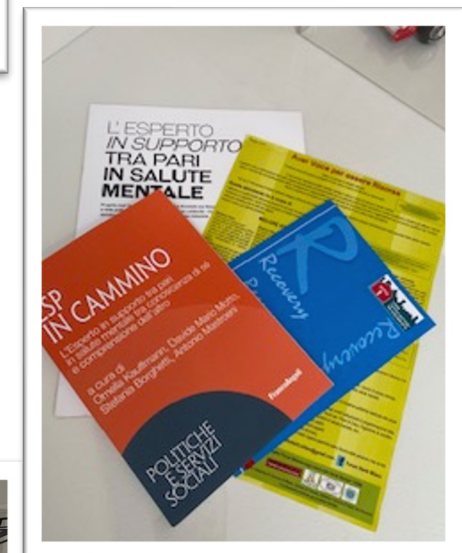
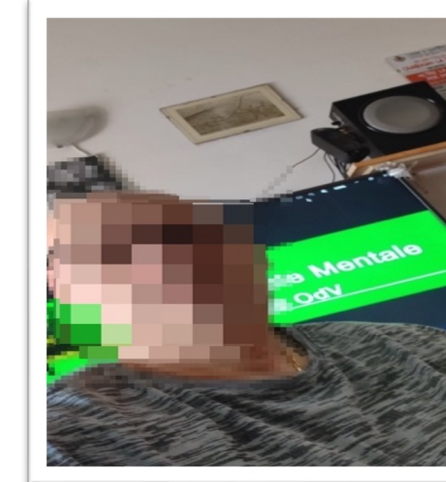
- **1 coordinator** from CoopLotta Cooperative
- **1 teacher-researcher** from the SEKEHE team at the University of Milano-Bicocca

Some **key points** from the interviews and focus group, using **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**...

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# 1. SEKEHE Project as an Outcome and Part of a Path of...

- **Recovery, empowerment, and inclusion** that they have been a part of.
- **Promoting EBEs' citizenship** through recognizing their role, responsibility, and value for the project.
- **Promoting a renewed perspective on mental health**, aided by the visibility and prestige of the project provided by public institutions such as universities.





## 2. SEKEHE Project as Recognition of...



- The **uniqueness and professionalism of EBEs** in promoting **student learning** based on their experience.
- **EBEs' contribution to improving mental health services** through their involvement in training future education professionals.
- The **educator's role and responsibilities in the field of mental health**, thanks to the reduction of the gap between theory and practice.

### 3. SEKEHE Project **as an Occasion...**

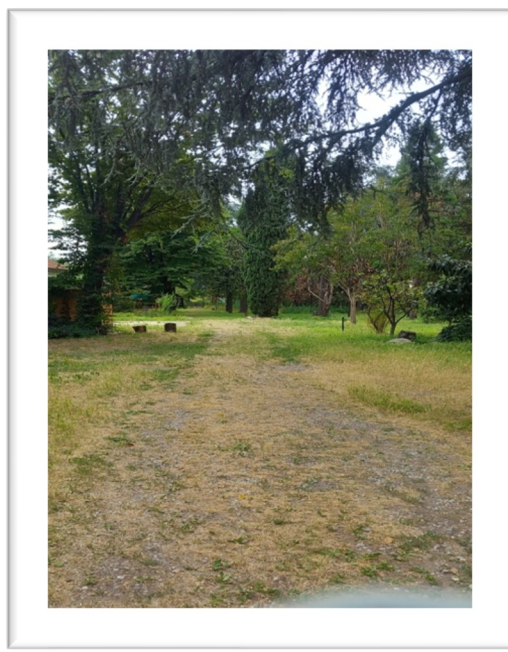


...to address **Challenges** and **Limitations** in involving EBEs as co-teachers in university:

- The **lack of formal recognition** of the EBE role and competencies.
- The **difficulty in economically recognizing a public assignment** for people receiving disability benefits.
- The **fatigue experienced** by EBEs resulting from co-teaching in the classroom.

## 4. SEKEHE Project as an Opportunity...

...to recognizing **Strengths** in involving EBEs as co-teachers in university:



- The **professionalism** and the **motivation** of Administrators **to go beyond predefined standards.**
- Understanding and sharing **project objectives** and the **perception of actively being part of a working group.**

...to recognizing **Perspectives** in involving EBEs as co-teachers in university:

- The **reconsideration of implicit biases underpinning representations of mental distress** and individuals with psychological challenges
- The **potential of EBEs** revealed through **co-teaching** in the classroom.

# **Some conclusions...** Fostering New Visions and Practices in Education

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- The SEKEHE project was an experience of co-constructing **new meanings and knowledge** about mental health.
- It was an opportunity to build awareness of **one's role and contribution in promoting community mental health**, beyond students.
- All stakeholders perceived themselves as active and essential **parts of the SEKEHE Project mission**.

The intertwining and dialogue between **diverse knowledge and skills** are crucial for **defining new academic horizons** and promoting **renewed perspectives** in mental health care training for future educational professionals.

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# Thank you!

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