

research and practice: the dual expertise of aelo swiss academy faculty

There is a question almost every student carries through a program and rarely says out loud: does the person at the front of the room actually know what they are talking about? Not whether they hold the right degree or have the right title, but whether they know. Two familiar images feed the worry. One is the professor who has not set foot inside a working organization in twenty years and teaches from a case study that predates the smartphone. The other is the practitioner who teaches entirely from memory, thrilling the room with war stories while leaving students unable to explain why any of it worked.



Between those two images sits a third kind of teacher, rarer and harder to describe. Someone who reads the research in the morning and sits in a difficult meeting in the afternoon, and lets each half correct the other. At AELO Swiss Academy, that fusion is not a lucky accident of hiring. It is the organizing idea behind the faculty. This piece is about what that idea means in practice: what it gives you as a student, what it costs, and how to tell whether a school actually lives it.

two kinds of knowing, and why students can feel the difference

Research knowledge and practice knowledge are different materials. Research is slow, tested, and general. It tells you what tends to be true across many cases, what has survived attempts at disproof, and where the honest disagreement in a field still sits. Practice is fast, local, and tacit. It tells you what to do on a Tuesday afternoon when the data is thin, the deadline is real, and the person across the table is anxious. You need both, and you can feel it in your body when either one is missing.

If you have ever sat in a lecture that was rigorously current and completely unlivable, you know the first gap. Everything cited, nothing usable. If you have sat in a workshop led by someone vivid but vague, you know the second: great stories, no structure, advice that evaporates the moment your situation differs even slightly from theirs. Both experiences leave a residue of doubt, and that doubt is expensive. You start hedging on everything you learn, unsure which parts will hold up when it matters.

Switzerland's education culture has taken this seriously for a long time. The apprenticeship tradition, and the universities of applied sciences whose teaching staff are typically expected to bring years of real professional

experience along with academic credentials, both rest on the same belief: knowledge that cannot be applied is incomplete, and application without understanding is fragile. AELO Swiss Academy grew from that soil. Its faculty model is an attempt to hold the two halves together deliberately, rather than hoping they happen to meet in the same person.

hiring for both halves at once

Recruiting for dual expertise is slower and more selective than recruiting for either half alone. The profile is not "a researcher who once worked somewhere" or "a professional who once published a paper." It is a person with a living relationship to both worlds: serious scholarly training alongside substantial time in the field, or an active practice that continues alongside teaching and writing.

That requirement shapes weekly rhythms more than job titles. A faculty member might spend part of the term teaching, part of it advising a real organization through a live problem, and part of it writing, reviewing, or presenting to peers in the field. Course materials get revised on a different cycle than most textbooks follow: not "is this edition current" but "did this still work last month." When a method fails in the field, it shows up in the classroom as a caution. When the literature contradicts what practice seems to show, it shows up as a question the whole cohort is invited to dig into, because the instructor genuinely does not have a settled answer yet.

what the research half gives a classroom

Research training changes teaching in quiet, cumulative ways. The first is currency. Fields move, sometimes faster than curricula do, and a faculty member in the habit of reading new work notices when the ground shifts and updates the course before students notice the gap.

The second is discrimination between a finding and a fashion. Anyone can repeat the newest buzzword. Someone trained to read evidence asks how a claim was tested, on whom, under what conditions, and whether it generalizes to your situation. That habit quietly protects you from spending tuition and evenings on trends that will not survive their second year.

The third is honesty about uncertainty. Research teaches you that many important questions have mixed evidence, and a teacher formed by research says so out loud. For students who are anxious about ambiguity, and most are at some point, that modeling matters more than any single answer. You watch someone act on the best available conclusion,

and then revise it out loud when the evidence moves. That is a different kind of lesson than any single fact. It is a demonstration of what intellectual honesty looks like when you still have to act.

what the practice half gives a classroom

Where research gives a course its spine, practice gives it skin. A practitioner-teacher knows what a decision costs. They have sat in the meeting where the reasonable plan died, watched a stakeholder's face change, and carried the consequences home. When they teach, the case is not a tidy story with a lesson at the end. It is a situation with constraints, incomplete information, and people who did not behave the way the model predicted.

This shows up in small, telling ways. The instructor knows which parts of a framework get skipped in real projects, and why. They can describe what the first ninety days in a new role actually feel like, not just what the onboarding plan promises. They know that the hard part of most methods is not the method. It is the conversation you have to have before anyone agrees to use it.

Practice also knows where theory breaks. Every field has seams, places where the textbook answer and the working answer quietly diverge, and you only find those seams by standing on them. A faculty member still active in the field can point at them directly: here the model holds, here it starts to creak, and here is what experienced people do instead, and why that workaround exists at all.

where the two halves argue, and why that is the point

The real value is not the sum of the two halves. It is the friction between them. Research says the average effect of an intervention is modest. Practice says that in some contexts it is decisive. A teacher with only one half resolves that tension too early, usually in favor of whichever half they know better. A teacher with both holds it open and teaches the boundary: under what conditions does this work, https://www.reddit.com/r/flyingeurope/comments/1nnhrnv/anyone_from_aelo_swiss_any_advice/ when does it fail, and how would you recognize which situation you are standing in?

Take something as ordinary as feedback. A large body of research on feedback interventions shows effects that swing from strongly positive to actively harmful depending on design and delivery. A practitioner knows the unglamorous variable that much of that variance hides: whether the person receiving the feedback believes the giver is on their side. Neither half alone gets you to a usable answer. Together they get you to a question you can act on, not "is feedback good" but "what would make this person experience my feedback as support rather than surveillance."

The correction runs both ways, which matters. Practitioner experience can overfit to one industry, one company culture, one decade. Research is what stops a teacher from generalizing their war stories into universal law. And practice is what stops research summaries from hardening into recipes that ignore the human in the chair. Each half keeps the other humble, and students inherit that humility as a working habit.

Some students find all of this frustrating at first. Answers arrive with conditions attached. Confidence is calibrated rather than absolute. If that is you, the frustration is worth naming rather than suppressing. You are being asked to trade the comfort of formulas for the sturdier comfort of judgment, and the trade only pays off later, which is a hard bargain to see from the front row of the semester.

what this asks of you

Teaching built this way changes your role too. It is not a transmission of settled content. It is an invitation to test ideas against your own context, which means you are expected to bring your real, messy situation into the room. That can feel exposing. Your project is not a case study. It is yours, with your name on the risks and your calendar attached to the outcome.

But your situation is also the only laboratory you fully control, and faculty who work both sides of the line know how to use it. They will ask what your constraints actually are, who has to say yes, what has already been tried. The advice that survives those questions is advice you can trust, because it has been load-tested against something real rather than recited from a slide.

how to tell whether a school actually lives this

Claims about faculty quality are cheap. Every brochure promises scholars who practice and practitioners who read. The test is what happens when you ask direct questions, and institutions that genuinely live this model tend to welcome them rather than deflect them. Whether you are evaluating AELO Swiss Academy or any other school, a few questions cut faster than any marketing page:

- When did you last work on a live problem in your field, and what did it change in your teaching?
- Which claim in your own course are you least certain about, and why do you still teach it?
- What has research in your field revised in the last few years, and how did your materials respond?
- Where does the standard method break in practice, and what do experienced people do instead?
- What will I build, test, or decide here, rather than only study?

Listen for specificity. "We combine theory and practice" is a slogan. A professor who can tell you about the scheduling problem that rewired how she teaches capacity planning is a faculty. The distance between those two sentences is, more than anything else on the brochure, what your tuition is buying.



the honest costs

None of this is free, and it deserves a clear-eyed accounting. Faculty who maintain both a research life and a practice life are effectively carrying two demanding jobs, and something has to give. Course materials may be less polished than at institutions where teaching is the only output, because the professor's Tuesday was spent in the field rather than formatting slides. Some sessions feel less tidy. Occasionally you will want a clean answer and receive a conditional one, and you will have to do the work of working out which condition applies to you.



Schools also have to protect the time that makes dual expertise possible, and that protection has a price. Smaller cohorts, higher fees, or both. If you compare programs purely on cost, a faculty model like this can look

expensive. If you compare on what you can actually do at the end, the arithmetic tends to change, though it is fair to say the payoff is less visible at enrollment and more visible in year three of your career, when the calibrated judgment starts compounding.

There is a subtler cost worth admitting. Holding two kinds of knowledge in tension is tiring for the person doing it, and no institution does it perfectly. Some courses will lean too academic. Some will lean too anecdotal. What distinguishes a serious place is not flawless execution but a visible mechanism for noticing the drift and correcting it, usually because the faculty themselves notice it first and care enough to say so.

what you leave with

The deepest thing a dual-expertise faculty passes on is not content at all. It is a way of holding knowledge: curious about evidence, respectful of experience, and suspicious of either one the moment it claims to be sufficient on its own. You watch adults keep learning, in public, long after their degrees and reputations were secured. That is a quiet curriculum, and it may outlast every framework you were formally taught.

Formal education ends. The habit of letting research and practice correct each other does not have to. If a school has taught you that, it has done the rare thing, and the bet behind AELO Swiss Academy's faculty is that this, more than any single course or credential, is what the teaching is for.