Shakin' the classroom
Spreading alternative knowledge sharing methods

Please briefly explain the knowledge sharing method/approach/tool.
What are the main processes? What are the expected outcomes? In what ways does that method bring change or represent an alternative to existing or dominant knowledge sharing settings and methods?

"Research and observation working groups" is an exercise invented in our master's degree some twenty years ago, and developed ever since. It consists in a three-month or nine-month group work (4-5 students) around a general topic proposed by a mentor in relation with contemporary topics, and with the mentor's academic knowledge and/or knowledge of the field. After having sought and read relevant bibliography, collected relevant empirical material (through meetings, in-place observation, discourse analysis and/or other methods), and chosen a more focused question, the group produces a written synthesis of the research (15-20 pages) and then presents it to the whole class for it to be discussed (one hour presentation and one hour debate).

This way, several outcomes are expected: production of knowledge and horizontal sharing about a contemporary topic in relation with the master's program; familiarization with scientific inquiry *through the practice*, depending on the encountered needs; team building, self-confidence in one's own skills, and awareness of the specifics of working together for intellectual purposes.

This approach is not brand new on every way; on the contrary, its interest rather resides in its little discrepancies with traditional ways of "producing scientific knowledge" _or_ "professional field experiences". Theory does not come first, and the process includes the methodological uncertainties of the group, as well as the necessity to adjust for the mentor. Research, reading, choices, are not done individually (as it is almost always the case in such exercises), but collectively. As every participant knows the efforts they put on their own research, they are more inclined to receive the other groups' results, and they have a better understanding of the production and assessment of a meaningful knowledge, and how they (even if not academics) can be part of it in a significant way.

If possible, please briefly explain the context in which the method has been developed.
Who were the main actors? What were the main reasons/motivations/inspirations behind the creation? Which previous developments have influenced it? If relevant, in what ways did the method/tool develop or change over time or in different locations/contexts?

The method was developed very locally, within the pedagogical team of the master. It was passed along the generations of its members, from professional trainers to academics. The links between "theory" and "practice", between individual and collective work, between training and professional activities, and between production, transmission and discussion of knowledge, have always been crucial in the development of the exercise. It also allows to deal with subjects which are important at a given time, but not (yet) covered by the program as such (virtual reality, sexism, participation, climatic change…).
There is a general continuity since the beginning, but also "interpretations" by mentors, students, and coordinator, in each of its actual implementation (does the group have to do actual observations, or "just" to read? Is the proposed topic mandatory, or can it evolve during the research process? What are the relations between the group and with the mentor supposed to be? Etc.).
Generally, and unfortunately, this methods relies only on individual (mostly oral) transmission within the master by now.

In your opinion, what kind of settings and participants is the method best suited for?
E.g. age, educational level, cultural and professional background, etc.

This method has only been implemented with students (including adult students in continuing education), but from various academic, geographical, professional… backgrounds. When properly implemented, it allows (relatively) heterogenous people to work together while taking advantage of their differences.
There are no specific requirements for the participants in terms of skills, knowledge, etc., given that the method serves a clear and explicated purpose, with a mentor, and with some time to be dedicated to it during a few months (3 to 9, in our implementations).

Are there any limitations?
Are there any requirements or limits in terms of location, number/profile of participants, tools and devices, time constraints and other? Are there certain skills, sensitivities or relations that need to be developed or assumed for the method to be successfully applied? Are there any contexts for which this method is not best suited?

Requirements: no, as the project is developed by confronting the encountered constraints (delimitation of the subject, accessibility of the resources and people, availability of the participants, etc.)
Skills and relations: creativity and adaptation, collective work; good coordination and communication between coordinator and mentors, mentors and members of their group, members of the groups

What are your experiences with the method?
In case you have tested or experienced the method beyond its primary environment, what are your experiences? Would you change anything or suggest further development?

Could you provide any relevant testimonies?
If possible, please provide testimonies, reflections and statements about the method from its authors and/or users.

Many generations of MA students and pedagogical team experimented this method. A lot of the written synthesis (in French) are also available online (see
http://www.masterdpaci.com/ressources/aro/, password "ressources")

Additional references
If possible, please provide additional links, materials, instructions and other relevant content.

Unfortunately, I am not aware of additional resources about this "local" exercise. That is why I think it is relevant here, because (in my opinion) it worth be shared wider.