

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?

The Historical Dinner Project is an initiative created by Stockholms Kvinnohistoriska (Stockholm Museum of Women's History) that aims to inspire and spread knowledge about women's lives in history.

The project consists of dinners where a company of guests are invited to share a personal story about a historical woman they would like the world to know about. The story can be about almost anything. It can be about a woman's achievements; it can be about her struggles or crimes – about a hero, victim or even a perpetrator.

Through listening and sharing we create new knowledge about our past, as well as a deeper understanding of the present. The personal dinner presentations all become part of a larger narrative. The dinners are documented and archived by Stockholm Museum of Women's History and are in turn added to our collective memory and collection of history.

Women are, and have always been 50% of the population. But according to award-winning historian, author, and broadcaster Dr Bettany Hughes, the inconvenient truth is that women only occupy around 0.5% of recorded history.

History is something used and created everyday. The selection of who and what is important enough to be remembered by many is an active choice by people like writers, historians and storytellers. The lack of knowledge of women in history is a global problem for democracy – and something we all can be a part of changing – together.

You who sit down at the table come with a story and leave with so many more. Together we will lift xx women from oblivion and make them part of our collective memory by speaking and telling about them. The goal is to create a dinner movement where an intimate group of guests together put women's lives on the historical map and introduce new women to quote, talk about and remember. By listening to and sharing stories, we form a new understanding of the past as well as the present. This is how we both write and change history.

In which way is this method alternative

How does it try to bring change or represent an alternative to existing or dominant knowledge sharing settings and methods?

Each guest gets to bring a 3-minute story about a woman whose story they want to share, that the world should know. The important thing during dinner is not to reproduce a person's life in detail, from beginning to end. Three minutes is long enough to describe a

person and a story, and at the same time give people an entrance to find out more for themselves.

The idea is to also be able to inspire how those interested can organize their own dinners to lift women's history out of oblivion and into more people's consciousness. Stories travel on and by sharing stories we help save events and women's stories from oblivion for the future. At the same time, we want to contribute to more people getting to try "giving speeches" and sharing stories in front of others.

Why oral storytelling?

Storytelling fulfills several functions: as an educational and social tool, storytelling as a preserver, enlivener and mediator of cultural heritage, and storytelling as a scenic art form. In this format, it is also about taking a seat and sharing. The written part is voluntary to take part in, but to share a story out loud in front of others is to take a real place.

The method will explore new ways of archiving digital information for the future: sound, images, movies? An exciting part of the project will be compiling and gathering different initiatives. Over time, the women who are mentioned and highlighted will give us a picture of what we value today, what we missed and what we want to contribute. It will be something for future researchers to sink their teeth into.

The project can be done in so many forms, with different numbers of participants, and the common threads that arise between the stories create an important, and sometimes painful, whole.

What are your experiences with the method 200 ord

In case you have created, tested or experienced the method, what are your experiences? How have you applied the method? Would you change anything or suggest further development?

The first dinner was carried out as an experiment together with the Book Fair in Gothenburg. In September, Stockholm's Women's History and Book Fair in Gothenburg gathered 39 female storytellers from near and far to have dinner together, with the aim of spreading women's history. Among the international guests were Helen Pankhurst, Siri Hustvedt, Jamaica Kincaid, Samar Yazbek and Han Kang. Already during the dinner, which one of the participants described as "one of the strongest experiences of her life", there were several participants who wanted to take the initiative with them to their home countries. The lack of women in history writing is a challenge all over the world and by collecting these initiatives and stories we hope to be able to deepen and broaden the different images of history.

In November 2020, IKFF (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom) held a dinner in Nairobi, Kenya, in collaboration with the Swedish Embassy. Interest also comes from Barcelona and New York - and here in Stockholm a dinner was held together with the non-profit organization ICLD Sweden (The Swedish international center for local democracy).

This is a long-term project that will grow over time, thus far too early to evaluate the results. Right now we are in the phase where we test, develop and try to reach a wider target group to see how the project and format can be expressed by different types of groups, perspectives and industries.

In your opinion, for what kind of pedagogical contexts, settings, participants and/or objectives is this method best suited for 200 ord

E.g. age, educational level, cultural and professional background, etc. Did it prove useful or successful in particular contexts and for particular objectives?

Because the world suffers from a chronic deficit of interesting stories about women's lives. After all, it is through our own, personal storytelling that we ordinary mortals can contribute to where the focus ends up, who gets to be part of the collective memory and a future historiography. Who do you quote, who are you inspired by, who do you remember?

Stockholms Kvinnohistoriska's work is imbued with the goal that all women should feel that cultural heritage both concerns and belongs to them, and we invite the public's participation in contributing perspectives that create a living, urgent and rich cultural heritage. The activity raises perspectives that have not been made visible enough, so more stories take place in our collective memory. So in our opinion, The Historical Dinner Project is a format that is suited for everyone, regardless if you are a queen or a housecleaner. We have all been involved and contributed to the society in which we live.

What are the requirements for applying this method? 300 ord

Are there any requirements or limits in terms of location, number or 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? What are the crucial points to pay attention to when implementing the method in different contexts? Are there any contexts for which this method is not best suited?

The only requirement is to have a place to meet, bring a 3-minute story about a woman they want to share, that the world should know. Not too many, but we would recommend a group between 20 persons. Because you want to remember all the stories and also have the time to eat or drink :)

The project can be done in so many forms, with different numbers of participants, the common thread is what arises between the stories. It is what creates an important, and sometimes painful, whole.

If possible, please briefly explain the context in which the method/tool/approach 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 inspiration for the design of the first dinner comes, among other things, from the famous artwork and installation "The Dinner Party" by Judy Chicago, which can be found at the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum in New York. Her work includes, among other things, a triangular table set with 39 plates, each representing a famous historical woman. The Historical Dinner Party instead lets real dinner guests tell the story of a woman whose story they want to spread.

Historically, dinners/meals are also a form of socializing where speeches were made and stories were shared - and where men took their place both physically and as the focus of stories. Even rhetoric has until very recently been the domain of men. This dinner is as much about lifting women's stories as it is about inspiring more female storytellers.

Judy Chicago's work "The Dinner Party" has inspired various art projects all over the world since the 70s. Some of the Swedish examples:

<http://hangmenprojects.com/work/the-family-dinner/>

<https://middagsjudningen.wordpress.com>

<https://news.cision.com/se/sodra-teatern/r/internationella-kvinnodagen-firas-stort-pa-sodran,c9224315>

Could you provide any relevant testimonies?

<https://www.thehistoricaldinnerproject.com/>