

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?

History Labs is Stockholm Museum of Women's History's transdisciplinary method for reflection on questions that are challenging and complex. History Labs is a practical method that deals with finding, developing, adding perspectives, problematizing and supplementing the picture of history and making the invisible visible. It is also a method that wants to bridge the gap between artistic practice, research and museum practice. By working transdisciplinary and bringing together researchers, artists, historians, museum staff, we can create contexts that enable new perspectives and new knowledge.

History Labs is a conversation format that brings together 6–12 people from different disciplines – researchers, historians, professionals in the culture and heritage sector and artists from different disciplines – with the aim of researching, generating ideas and sharing perspectives. The participants bring their own thoughts about exhibition productions, program series, research projects, artistic work or residencies. The participants explore together a defined theme, for example women who worked during a specific time period or within a specific context. Through the different skills of the participants, the women are connected with objects, photographs, documents, and also political and social contexts. The goal is to interdisciplinarily and creatively investigate and make available the women in existing archives and collections, which gives more people the opportunity to take part in the common cultural heritage. The method can also be used to make visible other groups that are underrepresented.

History Labs always has a conversation leader. The method can be implemented in collaboration with other organisations. It is then important that the partner organization is given space to explain its involvement and be involved in the hosting. A History Lab lasts 2–4 hours.

History Labs begins with a presentation of the participants and an introduction to the conversation and the issues to be discussed. The conversations take place both in big and smaller groups. During the conversations in small groups, the participants can build mind maps. History Labs does not strive for consensus but, on the contrary, wants to make visible and portray dialectics and diversity in perceptions. But in order for a conversation to be possible, i.e. an exchange that brings the participants to possible thought models that they cannot create individually, there must be a consensus around the issues.

Well before the conversation ends, divide the larger group into smaller groups again and have them do a retrospective of the conversation. **Support for this can be:**

- What primary challenges are identified?
- What opportunities are identified?
- Which collaboration and which form of collaboration seems particularly significant?
- Which perspectives are of particular importance?
- Have we identified methods that are important?

In which way is this method alternative? (up to 200 words)

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

History Labs is a practical method that is about finding, developing, adding perspectives, problematizing and supplementing the picture of history and making the hitherto invisible visible. It is also a method that wants to bridge the gap between artistic practice, research and museum practice. History Labs is a method for reflection on issues that are challenging and complex. Instead of searching for the correct answers and results, History Labs opens up for new questions and perspectives on various issues.

The goal is to interdisciplinary and creatively investigate and make available xxx in existing archives and collections, which gives more people the opportunity to take part in the common cultural heritage.

It is important that those who participate in the conversation have different backgrounds and experiences. History Labs is a conversation format for the whole person where their experiential as well as professional competence is called upon. All knowledge and experience are valued equally. By working transdisciplinary and bringing together researchers, artists, historians, museum staff, we can create contexts that enable new perspectives and new knowledge.

The conversation leader plays an important role during History Labs. It is important that the conversation leader provides support by leading the participants - without influencing the conversation in any way. The conversation leader's role is to create a safe and responsive room for the participants.

What are your experiences with the method? (up to 200 words)

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?

At Stockholm Museum of Women's History's we have tested the method on three occasions - always in collaboration with another organization. We have explored themes such as black history and women during two historic sailing expeditions linked to museum collections and archival materials, as well as #metoo. The participants had access to archive material and then talked about questions such as, for example:

- How can we find the women in a male coded material and data?
- What stories about the women should be there but have been left out of the historiography?
- How can new discoveries and information enrich the data that already exists so that the women are made visible in the material?
- How can a digital material, such as the #metoo calls, be collected and what ethical and practical issues must be resolved around tagging, personal data, ownership and research in the future?

We have on all occasions collaborated with the conversation leader Pernilla Glaser. We have used the method to gather different people to talk together about complex and important issues. The result has been rewarding, both for the participants but also for us as a museum.

In your opinion, for what kind of pedagogical contexts, settings, participants and/or objectives is this method best suited for? (up to 200 words)

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

The method can partly be used within the culture and cultural heritage sector, but the techniques can also be used as a conversation format in teaching and in workplaces. The method can be used by students, artists, academics and professionals in the culture and heritage sector. Above all, we see that the method opens up more people to examine archival material.

The techniques from History Labs can also be used as an introductory tool in an information meeting, as a way to quickly collect the views of many through reflection in small groups - based on a theme.

History Labs also emphasizes raising the cross-disciplinary perspective in the different parts of the business and describing different possible approaches to a theme. In the spirit of History Labs, special emphasis can also be placed on accommodating broad representation in as many contexts as possible.

What are the requirements for applying this method? (up to 300 words)

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?

General guidelines

- A History Lab is between 2–4 hours long.
- 6–12 participants.
- History Labs takes place in a demarcated room without flow and interference from other activities.
- History Labs always has a discussion leader who is responsible for a discussion climate that is characterized by respect, responsiveness and safety.
- An invitation to a History Lab is always personal. The invitation clarifies the purpose of the specific History Labs, why that particular person is invited and who else will be there.
- It is important for the conversation leader to know which people will be present.
- Sometimes some participants may need more preparation than others. If there are participants who risk blocking the conversation, it is valuable to talk to them beforehand and get their perspective, so they feel included.
- The participants in a History Lab have no documentation responsibility and it is good if they do not take notes but focus on being present in the conversation.

Introduction

- Start a History Lab by having everyone briefly present why they think they are there. Avoid formulating the presentation around professional roles or professional accounts.
- Let one person, the conversation leader or someone else who is familiar with the subject, make an introduction to the conversation. It needs to be short and focus on the issues to be discussed.
- If necessary, give room for additions to or corrections to the questions.

- History Labs does not strive for consensus but, on the contrary, wants to make visible and portray dialectics and diversity in perceptions.

The conversation

- 20-30 minutes is a suitable time span to reflect in small groups, that time allows for a concentrated conversation and for the participants to remember what they talked about.
- It is helpful for the participants that the conversation leader continuously explains how the next steps will unfold.
- The moderator can ask questions but does not dictate the conversation.
- It is sometimes useful for the interviewer to repeat what has been said to ensure clarity.
- It may make sense to have the questions that form the basis of the conversation present in the room, for example written on a piece of paper on the wall.
- It can also be helpful to have images and artifacts that stimulate discussion as a temporary exhibit.

Documentation

History Labs do not need to be fully documented. Some formats that may be useful:

- Have one or two people photograph and note main headings and core issues of importance in the conversation.
- Start a blog linked to the conversation where all participants can contribute before, during and after the conversation.
- Conduct follow-up interviews with participants.

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?

In 2016, Helene Larsson Pousette, curator and Fredrik Svanberg, head of research at the Statens Maritima Museer (Swedish National Maritime and Transport Museums), formulated a proposal to establish an interdisciplinary platform with a focus on history writing, history use and critical cultural heritage research – **History Labs**.

Pernilla Glaser, author, method developer and educator, has also been contributing to the development of the method as a conversation leader.

Additional references and links

If possible, please provide additional links, literature, instructions and/or other relevant content.

- See photos and read more about earlier History Labs at www.kvinnohistoriska.se/historylabs.
- See attached document for more detailed instruction. It's in Swedish but possible to easily translate.
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1OsU5kk7yH_rVJca2j8Mcbw-n5mNRFQNzxsCRsOnqPxo/edit#