

Your Learning History

In our rush to move forward, too often we ignore the lessons learned of the past. Taking time to remember the past and to share our collective history is an integral part of visioning.

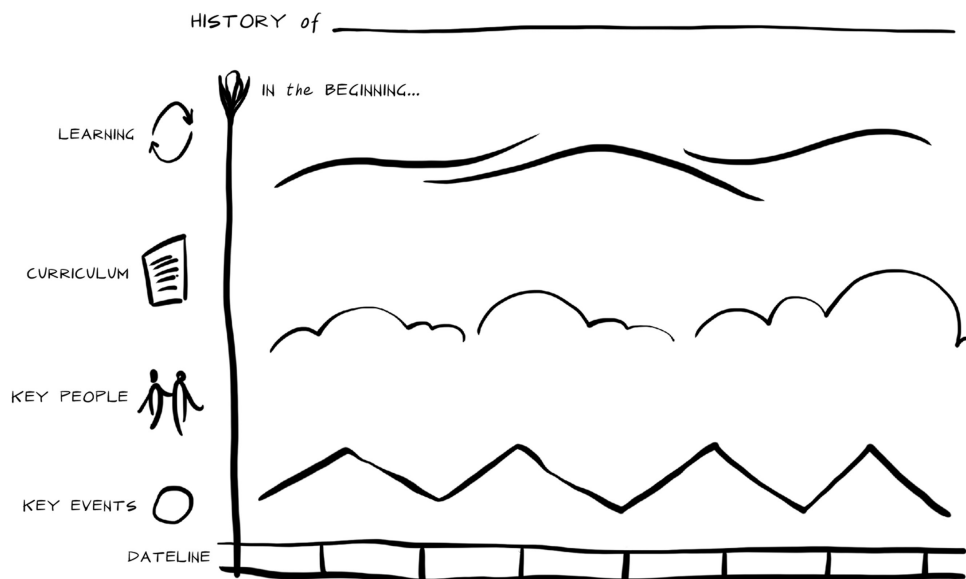
I first learned of this work through The Grove, a group of graphic facilitators led by David Sibbet. David is a forty-year veteran of working with large-scale community led change; he underscores in his work that change requires process, structure, and humanity in equal measure. The Learning History activity is one of my favorite tools because it honors the past and invites a group to learn from its shared history as it begins to design and create its future.

What is the history of your school or district? What is unique? What have you learned over the years? What do you want to carry forward?

We learn deeply through story and the learning history helps a community do just that. The learning history brings our past alive and honors the work that has gone before. A visioning process that does not take time to look back often has the unintended consequences of saying everything that has gone before is no longer valid and avoids the lessons learned from prior change initiatives. It invites the new people to learn from the veterans and it grounds the group in a shared understanding of history and of context. You cannot move people forward until you meet them where they are. This activity meets a group where it is—in a rich, fun and meaningful way.

You can facilitate this process by sketching the illustration in Figure 4.2 on a wall chart or whiteboard and starting the conversation with the large group by asking them to note their input using words or phrases and drawings. Alternatively, you can distribute sticky notes and ask group members to note items before beginning the large group conversation.

Figure 4.2 • Learning History



Source: Illustration by Kelvy Bird. Adapted from Graphic

Here are a few guidelines of what is typically included for each of the elements. It is helpful to begin the debrief from the ground up, that is, “Key Events,” making your way up toward the top and capturing “Learning.”

Learning: What did the school, district or team learn over the years? What have we learned about our school, district, and community? How might we leverage that learning as we begin to envision what we want to build moving forward?

Curriculum: How has the curriculum morphed and changed over the years? This can be an especially rich discussion; perhaps the school was leading project-based curriculum in the 1990s before the introduction of NCLB—and here we are, decades later, bringing it back!

Key People: Anybody related to the school community. Encourage participants to bring photographs to post in this section—they are a great addition to rekindle memories and spark discussion.

Key Events: Think broadly in scope—events could be building renovations, community key events, changes in pedagogy or technology, or leadership changes.

Dateline: You can pick whichever date suits the context of your work. It might be the start date of the founding of the school, this particular team, or project.

I have used this activity for groups of one hundred people (with wall charts sixteen-feet wide on the gymnasium walls) and with small groups of a dozen or so people with a sketch of the Learning History on a whiteboard.

Bringing teachers, administrators, parents, board members, students, and community members into this conversation helps a school and its community ground in its history before moving forward toward the future. It honors the past and the veterans in the school community and provides a strong foundation to begin visioning work.

