CoReD
Collaborative Redesign with schools

A school investigates the potential of their school hall as a community space

Belsay Primary School, UK

Tool: Diamond Ranking (DR)

Context:

School location	**Belsay Primary School, Belsay Village, Northumberland, UK**
Details about students	**No on roll: 87 (November 2020)** **4 classes: Reception, Year 1 / 2, Year 3 / 4, Year 5 / 6**
School premises	**Main part of school built in 1870. Grade II listed building. Additional hall and classroom added in 1996**
School context	**Rural village**
Type of activity	**Potential development of a community space**
Stage in design process:	**planning**

Tool used: Diamond Ranking https://www.ncl.ac.uk/cored/tools/diamond-ranking/

Rationale for activity and choice of tool adopted

Belsay Primary School is situated on land that belongs to Belsay Hall Estate in Northumberland i.e. not the local County Council. This is a conservation area. The main part of the school was built in 1870 and is a Grade II listed building. This means that there are strict guidelines for any proposed changes and the Head Teacher has limited agency over decision-making regarding the school building and grounds.

A new building was added in 1996. This included a community space 'the Middleton Hall' and one more classroom. The hall was intended to be used as a 'hub' for the local community to be used for a variety of purposes. It has a kitchenette and toilet, but this is not an accessible toilet.

The issue

Despite the fact that the Middleton Hall was designed as a community space, it is not currently used as such other than by a small number of groups such as the bowls club.

The school itself uses the hall for the pupils to have their lunch in, and for Physical Education (PE) lessons. The tables and PE equipment are stored in the hall and in an entrance area. This sends a message about its purpose and as a consequence the local community see the Middleton Hall not as a space to be used by them, but purely as a school space.

The Head Teacher had been considering for a long time whether or not there was potential for the Middleton Hall to be used more by the people in the village as originally intended when it was built. She was of the opinion that this could help foster a sense of community and raise the profile of the village. There would also be potential for the school to obtain some revenue.

However, she was aware that to make the hall useable for a variety of activities would require investment and possible building work to make the space more accessible and attractive. The first step for her therefore was to find out whether there was actually any demand for the hall to be used by the local community and if yes, what kinds of activities they would like to use it for.

The Head Teacher decided to use the Diamond Ranking tool with images of different activities. Ranking the images would enable the Head Teacher to obtain a clear picture of which activities would be the most and least popular. She felt that this had the potential to be a family activity that children and adults could do together.
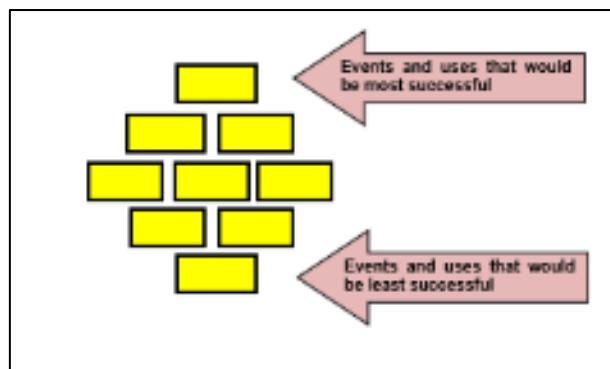
The Process

The Diamond Ranking tool was used to consult with the pupils, their families and the community. Nine photographs of different types of activity were sourced e.g. children's parties, community events, sports groups etc. (see below for examples)

Participants were asked to arrange them based on the following statements:

Events and uses that would be most/least successful

The Diamond Ranking activity was created in two formats:

1) A paper based activity that families could do together. The images, pieces of paper and instructions were given to the pupils in school to take home and placed in the village shop.

Belsay School

We would like to think about activities and events would be most successful in the Sir Stephen Middleton Community Hall to enable wider community use outside school hours. This will be a long term project and we welcome responses from as many people in the community.
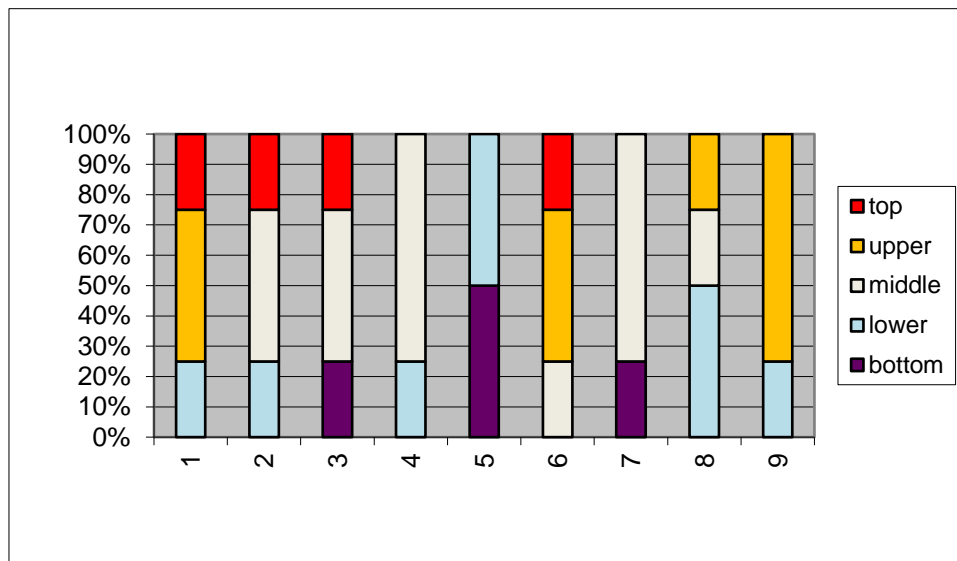
Please post your responses through the main door of the school by 30.6.21.

2) An online version was created using google forms. The link for this was disseminated via the school newsletter.

Outcomes and next steps

Completed Diamonds

The positions of the images were analysed using the DR instructions and excel spreadsheet
https://www.ncl.ac.uk/cored/tools/diamond-ranking/

This demonstrated that there were very mixed views from the respondents regarding the type of activities that could take place in Middleton Hall. Image 3 (exhibitions) for example was positioned in the top, middle and bottom position. However the analysis does clearly show that certain activities were consistently placed in the top half of the diamond: community meetings, sport's events, classes for children, children's' parties, weddings and charity fund raising.

Annotated comments

Analysis of the annotated comments alongside some of the photos showed a good understanding of how the hall could be used, and also some of the limitations e.g.

Image at top: *Small rural community and so the hall is ideal for community classes*

Image in upper position: *Evening/weekend classes for small groups would work well*

Images in lower and bottom positions: *We have put these 3 near the bottom because our hall has a very small kitchen to be able to cope with making/serving of food*

Image in lower position: *The hall is not suited to this type of event. Not large enough. Circulation space difficult.*

Image at bottom: *Weddings- the alcohol issue springs to mind and the mess/damage that could ensue. Involves a lot of set-up, de-set up, planning and possible risk. Would it be worth it?*

What did the data tell the Head Teacher?

The response to the Diamond Ranking activity was 'disappointing' according to the Head Teacher but she considered the effort worth it, as the lack of response also provided her with valuable information. Although she believed the pandemic to have impacted on the community's engagement with the task to a certain extent, she also felt that had there been a real desire and need for the hall to be used by the community, that people would have taken the opportunity to respond. The fact that the Diamond Ranking was disseminated in two formats via the school and village shop and still didn't get much response confirmed, in her mind, this lack of community interest.

She reflected after the data collection and analysis that there were probably several reasons why the Middleton Hall was not considered appropriate as a community space:

- there are several community halls nearby that are more aesthetically pleasing and better equipped to hold large events- local people tend to hold wedding receptions at these because of the photo opportunities which is increasingly important in the social media age,
- because the hall is in use by the school during the day, Monday-Friday, events and clubs etc. would not be able to set up until after the pupils had gone home. These time constraints might put people off,
- the pandemic has affected the type and amount of events that people organise,
- because the community and parents see the Hall as a school space, it would need a change in mind set for them to engage with it in a new way and this would be difficult to achieve without major investment.

Undertaking the Diamond Ranking activity provided the Head Teacher with valuable information, ensuring that she did not embark on costly and unwarranted changes/additions to the Middleton Hall.