Actual and ideal learning spaces: how diamond ranking images enables the investigation of current experience and also exploration of desires and preferences for the learning environment.

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Challenges of initiating a process of change in an educational context

- Education seems resistant to change
  - The 'structural conservatism of education institutions’ is part of their role in transmitting knowledge and culture from generation to generation (Young & Muller 2010: 15)
  - ‘The mysteries of change’ (Fullan 2007:42)
    - ‘Whole school change is elusive in practice and in the literatures’ (Thomson 2007:10)

- Participation is central to successful change
  - ‘the direct involvement of staff seemed to have played a part in encouraging school-wide innovation’ (Ouston et al. 1991)

- Change can be facilitated or constrained at different levels:
  - culture, structure, agency (Priestley 2011)

Reflecting on use of physical space provides shared starting point in understanding needs and desires

Physical aspects act as part of the existing structure that can help or hinder change
Diamond ranking

- Producing a diamond
- Displaying diamonds
- Analysis
- Drawing conclusions

- Relating to existing school space
- Relating to possible school space

Staff

Students
Producing a diamond rank of images

Diamond rank the nine photographs:

Good place for learning

Poor place for learning
Visual mediation to overcome problems…but also to enhance interaction

- Reduces ‘overt privileging’ of verbal interaction (Prosser 2007:15)
- ‘There is a need...of bridging the gap between the worlds of the researcher and the researched.’ (Harper 2002: 20)
- allow participants to ‘set the agenda, to decide what is important, and to work at their pace’ (Prosser 2007:24)
- ‘photographs can jolt subjects into a new awareness of their social existence’(Harper 2002: 21)
- ‘the method gave us access to a wider range of voices than might have been obtained through interview alone’ (Bragg & Buckingham, 2008: 121 - teenagers creating scrapbooks)
- ‘visual materials produced act as “mediating artefacts’ aiding communication between the participants’ (Clark 2010: 151)
How it works in practice

- Initial engagement: images have an immediacy
- Highly structured activity is easy to start; writing is not required
- Provides a *focus* for a focus group
- Same activity works well with children, young people and adults
- Spatial aspect to activity seems to help clarify ideas
- Diverse ideas conveyed by single image; comments range from specific to abstract

See Woolner & Thomas 2009; Woolner et al. 2010; 2012a&b; 2014; Woolner & Clark 2015; Clark et al 2013
In practice...some challenges

- Can be difficult to use photos to talk beyond the ‘here and now’
- May be perceived as “childish”
- When people “know what they want to say”, they may see ranking activity as a distraction

See Woolner et al. 2010; Woolner & Clark 2015
Displaying diamonds

Completed diamonds can
- be used to enable comparison of opinions
- generate further discussion
- lead to next stage of a collaborative process
Analysis: rankings

Preferences and problems of *existing* places *or* ideas about *possible* spaces

Can show overall preferences or compare responses across groups of participants

Staff responses

Student responses (Y3/4)
Analysis: comments (existing spaces)

- Annotations range from very specific ("no locks on toilet doors") to more general (see below)
- Unexpected views revealed (the dining room was liked)

See Woolner et al. 2010
Annotations make specific points ("too much clutter") but also enable wider values to be revealed:

- Pupil engagement
- Group work, collaboration
- Independent learning
- Discussion

See Woolner et al. 2014; Woolner & Clark 2015
Drawing conclusions: reporting back

- Reports/presentations bring together experiences and views to feed into development of space.
- Diamonds can be revisited in light of new experiences.
- Reports can include ranks and ideas from diamonds.
Diamond ranking:

- can facilitate the involvement of the diverse groups that comprise a school community: ‘the differing views of those with different roles produced a more complete understanding of the complex functioning of the school and the potential influences of this setting on learning’ (Woolner et al. 2010: 19)

- complements other methods: ‘the various methods highlighted different aspects...it seems advisable to use a variety’ (Woolner et al. 2010: 20)

- can be adapted to research or enagement needs: quantitative analysis reveals preferences and extent of shared views; qualitative analysis reveals values and nuances of understanding


Your turn…

Diamond rank the nine photographs of UK school space:

1. ein guter Ort zum lernen
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
6. 
7. 
8. 
9. ein schlechter Ort zum lernen
Discussion: benefits and challenges we have noticed in practice

- Immediacy (also limiting: hard to discuss the future or not known)
- Inclusivity (but might seem childish to some)
- Empowering participants (depends on wider context of the change process)
- ‘Something to look at’ aids discussion and collaboration
- Spatial aspect to clarifying ideas
- Iterative aspect is useful in developing ideas, as part of change process