What Stick Figures Tell Us about Irish Politics

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Where we come from

- Previous work involved students using freehand drawing in critical self-reflection
- "Doing research with people, rather than on them" (Bray et al. 2000: 7)
- Shared sense of experience - freedom to express in non-traditional manner
- Drawings, enjoyable, simple, yet deceptively revealing
- Learning experience an unfolding collaborative process of inquiry

What we interpret:

- Image of Ireland and euro - interesting in context of the question
- People debating, questioning, seeking consensus - perception of Irish politicians?
- Unhappy people under a cloud of taxes and other charges

Interpreting the drawings

- Reflect the learners' personal understanding and experiences
- Many approaches to analysing learner-generated drawings
- Storytelling - drawings; there is a narrative element (Guidera, 1980)
- Pattern and decoration tendency to give additional detail, shape and order to drawings (Hall, 2008)
- Sample of 7 drawings out of over 1,100 so far collected

The student's narrative:

- Irish politics is about how the government "helps"
- People craving food, shelter, etc., whilst Government wastes wheelbarrow loads of workers' hard earned money

What emerged

- Tiny sample of drawings presented, but, overall, largely negative perspectives on Irish politics - general sense of malaise and dissatisfaction
- Overwhelming sense of crisis
- But protest is largely absent
- Conservatism of Irish society
- Sense of powerlessness and inaction
- People resigned to status quo
- Elitism and conronism in upper echelons of society
- Strong perception that politicians are either corrupt, incompetent or self-serving
- Lots of questions, but no answers
- A negative attitude towards the EU
- An absence of political transparency and accountability
- In whose interest does democracy function?

The student's narrative:

- Government is wasting a lot of money
- Yes, citizens crave shelter and food.
- Ordinary citizens disgruntled

What we interpret:

- Government pillaging citizens for every cent
- "A four he says is "I don't know""
- Sense of uncertainty and confusion

Doing freehand drawing

- First class, provided students with A4 sheet and pre-printed instructions:
  - Side 1: "Through a drawing answer the following question: What is Irish Politics?"
  - Side 2: "Now, in your own words, describe/explain what you have drawn"
- Drawing (10 - 15 mins):
- Describe/explain what had drawn (10 mins)
- Bridge gap between intended message and onlooker's interpretation
- Divide students into groups of 5 for discussion (25 mins)
- Rapporteur recorded discussion
- Second class, facilitated debrief of class
- Rapporteur noted on flipchart sheets; opened floor for discussion

The student's narrative:

- An illustration of an endless series of questions to our political leaders, with no answers in return

What we interpret:

- Numerous hard questions are addressed to the figure – presumably a politician
- "A four he says is "I don't know""
- Sense of uncertainty and confusion

Contact us

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To see our previous research on this topic: