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Using drawings to understand perceptions of civic engagement across disciplines: 'Seeing is understanding'

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Abstract

In this article, we wish to investigate if disciplinary differences exist among students when considering the topic of civic engagement. We use freehand drawing to create a learning environment in the classroom wherein students can seek to develop meaningful associations with civic engagement. The drawings examined here, produced by three different class groups, provide insights into how young adults perceive their society and their place in it, and thus communicate their understanding of civic engagement. Freehand drawing, in bypassing cognitive verbal processing routes, leads students to produce clearer and more holistic images. It allows them to put into visuals a level of comprehension that is sometimes difficult for them to articulate with words. This use of the visual method can help students to identify the tacit knowledge that they already possess.

Introduction

As educators, we want our students to reflect critically on society and their place in it. We desire that they can evaluate various perspectives and come to reasoned conclusions. This will involve their questioning taken for granted assumptions, many of which can be discipline biased. Science, for example, is usually considered as being 'based on a representational view of knowledge, in which organizational phenomena are approached as empirical objects with descriptive properties' (Romme, 2003: 558). This analytic approach is useful when considering existing or emerging organisational phenomena (Mohr, 1982; Ziman, 2000). Alternatively, the humanities are usually seen to use models that consider knowledge more 'constructivist and narrative' in approach (Gergen, 1992; Parker, 1995).

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Freehand drawing – a visual elicitation technique that permits students to see that there are potentially multiple ways to analyse and challenge any issue (Feeney et al., 2015) – serves as a useful tool to aid understanding of a topic. As a teaching approach, capable of generating a critically reflective stance (Rose, 2008), freehand drawings can build students' ability to engage in critical thinking as well as providing insights into their perceptions (Dean, 2015; Donnelly and Hogan, 2013). By enabling students to draw their own interpretation, they have a visual representation of their thoughts that transcend verbal reasoning. This approach tends towards complication and complexity, rather than simplification as in instructional pedagogies (Dehler et al., 2004: 168).

Our aim in using this approach, with final year degree students from the sciences and humanities, is to compare and contrast their understanding of civic engagement, a topic that is transdisciplinary in nature. The activity involves the learners representing through freehand drawings their personal, non-verbal, interpretation of what they understand civic engagement to mean. The article presents a sample of these student-generated images to see if they represent a discipline biased conceptualisation of civic engagement. In recent years, many Irish higher education institutions (HEIs) have reimagined their missions. HEIs can no longer focus only on teaching and research but must now embrace a third purpose: developing students' civic capacity and preparing them to become active democratic citizens. However, there is no agreed definition of civic engagement (Jacoby, 2009). But, for simplicity, we take 'civic engagement' to mean the 'ways in which citizens participate in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future' (Adler and Goggin, 2005: 236).

The article begins with a section on the utility of visual representation, followed by a consideration of the use of drawings in the context of critical pedagogy. After this comes a section on the embedding of civic engagement in the Irish higher education curriculum. We then discuss how our drawings were created in the classroom. Thereafter, we examine the drawings and what they tell us about the students' critical understanding of civic engagement. Finally, we discuss the pedagogical implications of our approach before concluding the article.

The utility of visual representation

The youth of today are 'inundated with more visual images than any generation in history' (Bennis, 2007: 4). Consequently, visual representation occupies a 'central role in promoting and facilitating the formation, reflection and inflection of what we "take for granted"' (Slutskaya et al., 2012: 17). As Williams (2003) points out, in an increasingly media dominated environment, it is wrong to ignore the importance of visual images. However, despite its ubiquity, the visual is still largely missing from the university classroom; and, the nexus between politics and visual representation remains insufficiently explored (Sylvest, 2013).

The employment of visual techniques encourages a more vibrant exploration of a phenomenon and challenges conventional wisdom (Parker, 2009). Gauntlett (2007) has used visual and creative methods, including video, drawings, and Lego, to explore identity creation among children and professionals, while Ingram (2011) and Abrahams and Ingram (2013) have used plasticine models to explore identities in secondary school and university settings. The production of these drawings, pictures or models serve as a springboard to detailed in-class discussions. As Dean (2015) points out, there is a need for verbal explanation post-drawing.

In employing visual methods, learners can express themselves and address what may otherwise be uncomfortable (Slutskaya et al., 2012), or unfamiliar, and surface hidden perspectives (O'Neill, 2008). Freehand drawings function as 'a catalyst, helping them [students] to articulate feelings that had been implicit and were hard to define' (Zuboff, 1988: 141), raises participants' voices through allowing them set the agenda and own the discussion (Warren, 2005), and create a 'third space' (Parker, 2009) in the room. This use of visual techniques creates agency for participants through their production of images (Mitchell and de Lange, 2011).

Visual methods can help learners to access information, and sometimes identify previously unrecognised insights and tacit knowledge of their relational and situated experiences (Bassett, 2011; Butler-Kisber and Poldma, 2010). Using a 'whole brain approach', this method enhances learners' capacity to make sense of things (Kearney and Hyle, 2004: 380). Drawings can encourage active participation in the learning process and the integration of visual with verbal data provides a useful form of data triangulation. Thus, in situations where a professor would prefer not to impose a cognitive framework on students prematurely, the use of visual instruments seems ideal (Meyer, 1991: 232).

Using drawings as critical pedagogy

Drawing has been of interest to psychologists for over a century. Most studies on the use of drawings see them as a tool for understanding the behaviour patterns of children and as a way of providing observations and questions (see Rubin, 1984; Thomas and Jolley, 1998). In recent years, drawings are being used as a method of data collection (Merriman and Guerin, 2006), and as a pedagogic tool (see Dean, 2015; Donnelly and Hogan, 2013; Feeney et al., 2015). Donnelly and Hogan (2013: 5) found 'the use of freehand drawing in the classroom to be an immediate, yet non-threatening, way to focus students' attention on critical self-reflection and developing understanding of their own and others' deeply held frames'. Indeed, Page and Gaggiotti (2012: 74) proffer that visual representation 'offers a relatively new medium for critical inquiry that accesses modalities of knowing that are sensory, aesthetic, affective, embodied and that cannot be reduced to the propositional'. For Dean (2015), visual representation through drawings can play a role in critical pedagogy, encouraging deeply reflexive accounts of each participant's behaviour and knowledge.

Therefore, the visual, as freehand drawings, can constitute part of a critical pedagogy and generate critical thinking. Critical pedagogy is context specific and descriptive, it critically analyses the world (Monchinski, 2008: 2). For Giroux (1997), critical pedagogy is purposely transformational, as it adopts the position that teaching and learning are dedicated to broadening the possibilities for students. However, introducing critical pedagogy, through use of the visual, necessitates redefining the roles and responsibilities of faculty and students (see Donnelly and Hogan, 2013; Feeney et al., 2015).

Deposing faculty is about positioning faculty and students on the same epistemological ground, where everything is contestable (Fobes and Kaufman, 2008). This is about engaging in a shared journey to attempt to understand the other out of mutual respect (Barnett, 1997: 55). Critical pedagogy 'challenges students and teachers to be aware of their own position in the larger structure of power and the role they are supposed to play in reproducing it' (Malott, 2011: 159). Our approach to critical pedagogy is to create a participative learning environment where students develop as critical beings.

The decentred classroom creates a learning environment that encourages students to engage in critical commentary (Dehler et al., 2004), which can produce a more open and

creative intellectual environment (Allison et al., 2012). Students move from conveying an understanding of extant theories to theorising their own experience within the context of the broad array of understandings to which they are exposed. When they problematise, students exhibit 'intentional learning, i.e., they activate prior knowledge, relate old to new in reflective ways, reach conclusions, and assess those conclusions before settling upon them' (Dehler et al., 2004: 177), in the process developing as 'emancipated' learners.

Drawing on Barnett (1997: 111), we wish to offer students, through the use of freehand drawing, an educational experience that challenges them to develop their own critical stances. The use of freehand drawings, in affording students the space to develop a critical disposition, provides an opportunity to consider what social functions their disciplines serve (Reynolds, 1999). Crucially, 'visual political knowledge is different from verbal political knowledge and represents a previously unmeasured element of political involvement' (Prior, 2014: 54).

Civic engagement in Irish higher education

The topics of civic engagement and active citizenship, while not new in the United States and Australia, have grown increasingly important in Europe in recent years (Moro, 2012; Putnam, 1995; Van Dyke, 2013). Ireland is an interesting case when considering civic engagement in higher education, particularly over the past two decades. The 1997 Universities Act set out a range of objects within a civic engagement rubric – promoting the cultural and social life of society, supporting economic and social development, and disseminating research outcomes to the public (McInerney and Carney, 2012).

In 2007, Ireland was at the height of an economic boom. A 'Taskforce on Active Citizenship' was established with the goal of 'advising the Government on the steps that [could] be taken to ensure that the wealth of civic spirit and active participation already present in Ireland continue[d] to grow and develop' (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007). This Taskforce recommended that a network of HEIs, led by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), be established to promote, support, and link civic engagement activities, including service-learning and volunteering. Service-learning is a form of civilly engaged scholarship in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs (Welch, 2004). Thus, 'amongst those advocating civic engagement in higher education, strategic alignment with institutional policy is frequently advocated' (Boland, 2010: 2). In 2007, an Active Citizenship Office, under the aegis of the Department of the Taoiseach, was established. Unfortunately, the initiative stalled in 2008 as Ireland experienced its most severe economic crisis in a generation (Feeney et al., 2015).

Nonetheless, HEIs continued to expand their provision of community based and linked modules (Boland, 2010), as well as state funded initiatives in the voluntary and community sectors. Vision and mission statements embraced local and regional priorities. The National Strategy for Higher Education 2030 (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) states that HEIs need to renew their commitment to their civic mission. This strategy, while acknowledging the value of work placements for students, promotes service-learning as it provides them with the opportunity to gain experiential learning and civic responsibility. The year 2014 saw most Irish HEIs sign the Campus Engage Charter that emphasised their commitment to civic and community engagement.

The potential of HEIs to promote and advance ideals around social cohesion and European citizenship has also been recognised (see Biesta, 2009; Commission of the European Communities, 2003, 2005; Feeney, 2014; Feeney and Horan, 2015, Feeney and

Hogan, 2016; London Communique, 2007; Van Dyke, 2013). This has been reinforced by representatives from HEIs who recognise that their role goes beyond the creation of workers, and includes a wider responsibility for cultural, social and civic development at both European and national levels (see Biesta, 2009; European University Association, 2002, 2003; Simons et al., 2007).

In higher education, civic engagement encompasses a range of approaches to developing the civic skills, interests, and participation of students, staff, and institutional management (Gonzalez-Perez et al., 2007). Developing a workable civic engagement class requires finding a community partner appropriate to the course learning aims, and that results in success both in the classroom and community (Lorenzini, 2013).

It must be recognised that civic engagement:

> presents a challenge to universities to be *of* and not just *in* the community; not simply to engage in 'knowledge-transfer' but to establish a dialogue across the boundary between the university and its community which is open-ended, fluid and experimental. (Watson, 2007: 3)

Holdsworth and Brewis (2014) wonder that if the idea of active citizenship assumes that volunteering is a choice; then, does the political endorsement of civic engagement, whether through universities or schools, undermine the essence of voluntary activities? In studying the situation in the United Kingdom, Watson (2007) and Brewis (2010) found that the current drive towards more directional engagement is very different from the student-led community initiatives of 50 years ago. May et al. (2005) argue that the more formalised approach to engagement in the United Kingdom reflects the expanding reach of the voluntary sector as it increasingly takes over from the state in providing services. Some British students felt that volunteering should be something freely chosen, and that compulsion applies to other aspects of university education (Brewis and Holdsworth, 2011).

Despite the civic disengagement of young people (Keeter et al., 2003), higher education should enable students to become active, reflective, and committed citizens (Strand et al., 2003: xiii). Bennett (2008) notes that young people, dissatisfied with politics and society, are less inclined to vote or volunteer but are more engaged online and with charities. Howland and Bethell (2002) found that this disinterest stems from their disempowerment in relation to the institutions and mechanisms of politics. However, Berger (2011) argues that there are three separate, but interconnected, forms of civic engagement – political, social, and moral engagement, and as one weakens the others can become stronger. Thus, the young are withdrawing from traditional forms of engagement and supplanting these with new forms of participation.

Creating the drawings

The drawings were collected from final year students in three degree programmes comprising three disciplines: business, science, and engineering. These courses were selected to see if students in different disciplines had different understandings of civic engagement. Whereas previous research using visual techniques examined the creative products of specific groups, by engaging with three distinct groups, we wish to compare and contrast their images and understandings to ascertain whether their core discipline influenced their drawings. The business class was the largest with 33 students, there were 18 engineering students, and the science class had just 12, giving 63 participants in all. Whereas

the business class had a slight majority of females, science was completely female; while engineering had a male majority, giving a gender breakdown of 37 females to 26 males. All were Irish citizens aged between 21 and 24 years.

For each cohort, a class was dedicated to the topic of 'civic engagement' in the spring of 2017. No prior readings on this topic had been assigned, and none of them had completed any civic engagement or service-learning modules as part of their studies. At the commencement of the class, we provided each student with an A4 sheet of paper, with instructions on one side stating: 'Through a drawing answer the following question: What is civic engagement?' The other side said: 'Now, in your own words, describe/explain what you have drawn'. Students could use whatever drawing instruments they had available.

We gave 20 minutes to create the drawings. A few participants expressed concern that they could not draw, but we reassured them that such an ability was irrelevant. This put their concerns at rest and they participated. We then asked the students to turn the sheet over and address the instruction on the reverse for 10 minutes. Following this, the students returned their drawings and these formed part of the class discussion regarding civic engagement.

Each drawing was shared on a board and the class discussed their collective interpretation of what its creator was saying. We used a flipchart to capture their insights, prompting them to elaborate any assumptions they saw. We spent about 2 minutes per drawing to keep momentum going and the room energised, and affixed the flipchart sheets to the classroom walls after the discussion of each drawing. The class concluded with a session opening the floor to reflection/discussion, asking what the exercise told us about perspectives and assumptions relating to civic engagement, about what we notice and what we ignore, what we take for granted and fail to question.

As interpretation plays a part in divining meaning from images, the reporting of that interpretation involves thick description (Polgar and Thomas, 2008: 248). Thus, we ended with short paragraphs on each drawing, along with what was captured on the flipchart sheets, all of which were broadly similar in their interpretations, with some nuances here and there. As the students who authored each drawing had provided their own interpretations of their drawings, this process allows us to compare/contrast, and reflect on, the individual and collective (discipline) interpretations.

After the drawings were collected, they were initially examined for their contents which were recorded quantitatively in Table 1 below. Each of the images was then examined qualitatively. There are many qualitative approaches to analysing learner-generated drawings, including those used by Hall (2008) which revolves around themes of self and identity, storytelling, pattern and decoration, and special interests. Hall's (2008) study focused on how young children communicate through drawing. *Self and identity* refers to drawings being seen as an expression of an individual's perception of their self-image (Hall, 2008; Hawkins, 2002; Malchiodi, 1998). *Storytelling* refers to drawings where there is a narrative element. These drawings can depict stories from the external environment (Gardner, 1980; Hall, 2008). *Pattern and decoration* refers to a tendency by some children to give additional detail, shape, and order to their drawings (Burkitt, 2008; Hall, 2008). *Special interests* refer to a drawing that includes details incorporated by a subject expert.

What the drawings tell us about civic engagement

Drawings provide a challenging set of data for consideration. They reflect the learners' personal understanding and experiences in their answer to the question 'What is Civic

Engagement?' The students, in this instance, are active learners in a classroom environment and were seeking to provide a visual representation to illustrate their interpretation. In addition, the students provided some written explanations as to what their drawings represent. This went some way towards bridging the gap between the students' intended message being understood by anyone looking at their drawing. This was deemed an important addition to the data, as it is possible to misinterpret/over-interpret drawings (Lewis and Lindsay, 2000). The drawings show elements of the learners' attempt to answer the question 'what is civic engagement?' in what we consider to be primarily a '*storytelling approach*' (Hall, 2008) although some drawings exhibit significant detailing and might incorporate elements of the '*pattern and decoration approach*' (Hall, 2008).

Table 1. Themes contained within the images and accompanying explanations (n = 63).

Theme[a]	Business (n = 33)	Engineering (n = 18)	Science (n = 12)	Total (n = 63)
Campaigning	2	2	4	8
Making a difference	6	2	2	10
Community involvement	6	5	12	23
Agreements	2	1	2	5
Changing	2	1	4	7
Voluntary work	5	2	4	11
Helping others	12	3	2	17
Stewardship	5	0	2	7
Role in society	2	3	2	7
Working together/ cooperation	8	8	1	17
Communication	5	1	0	6
Discourse	3	0	0	3
Voting	4	0	0	4
CSR	3	0	0	3

CSR: Corporate Social Responsibility.
[a]Some drawings contain more than one theme.

While we gathered and examined 63 drawings, this article presents a sample for illustrative purposes. This sample, two drawings from each class, is representative of the clusters of ideas represented in these classes. In Table 1, we can see the frequency with which each of the 14 themes that emerged were present in the drawings and their accompanying explanations, for each of the classes sampled, and overall. Table 1 shows how similar the majority of the images produced were, with 'community involvement', 'helping others', and 'working together' featuring strongly among students from each of the classes and overall. In all, 23 drawings, or accompanying explanations, focused on the theme of community involvement; while at the other extreme, only three drawings discussed corporate social responsibility (CSR) and these were produced, not surprisingly, by business students. In the all-female science class, every drawing produced contained some element of engagement and community engagement, whereas in the other two classes no issue achieved such universal representation.

We recognise that, as Dean (2015) points out, using only a sample of the participants' drawings, and seeing them as emblematic of the wider pool, raises questions about the generalisability of findings. Each of the figures presented below is followed by our

description of the drawing, the written narrative provided by the learner as an explanation of their illustration, and the collective interpretation of the drawing.
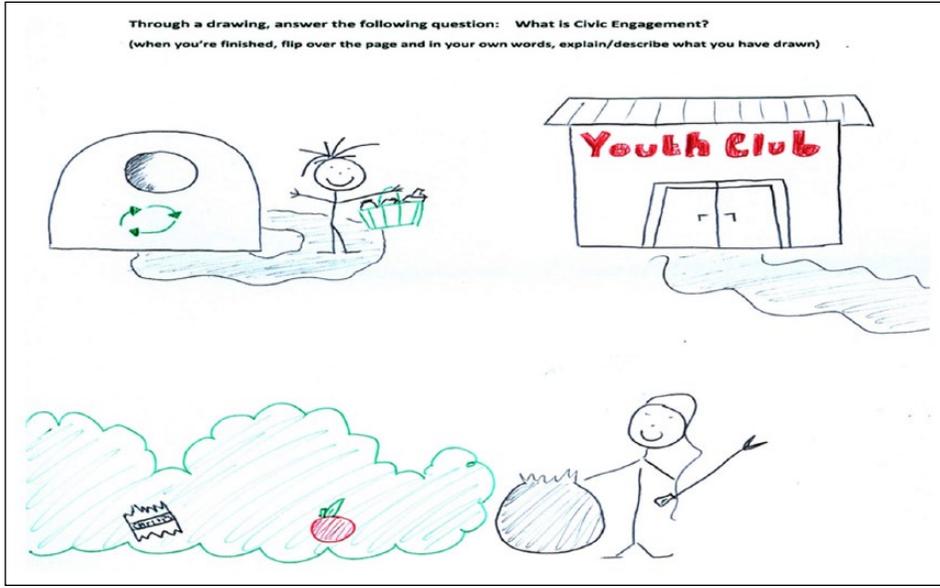
Business faculty student drawings

Figure 1. Business faculty student drawing sample 1.

Our description – Figure 1 incorporates significant detail and depicts three separate contexts for the learner's understanding of civic engagement. This drawing fits with the storytelling approach, with a narrative element as proposed by Hall (2008). However, unlike the other drawings presented, this employs various colours – an emotionally expressive choice (Burkitt, 2008). The drawing shows a happy citizen recycling waste in the first image; then, the learner moves on to a depiction of a youth club. This is an interesting element to the drawing, as it shows that the learner considers collective activities, as well as individual activities, as having relevance to their understanding of civic engagement. The third and final element shows an individual collecting litter. Again, the individual is drawn with a happy expression while carrying out their civic duty.

Learner's narrative – this includes three points:

- Local community recycling facilities,
- Local youth clubs – run by volunteers,
- Local community are picking up litter.

Collective interpretation – this drawing generated significant interest in class. Student discussion revolved around whether civic responsibility for waste recycling and litter should be considered civic engagement. The depiction of the youth club with closed doors also generated discussion, with some disagreement about whether civic engagement is a community, or an individual, issue. All of this highlights the value of images in

the meaning-making process, as well as critical thinking and idea generation in the university classroom (Zull, 2011).
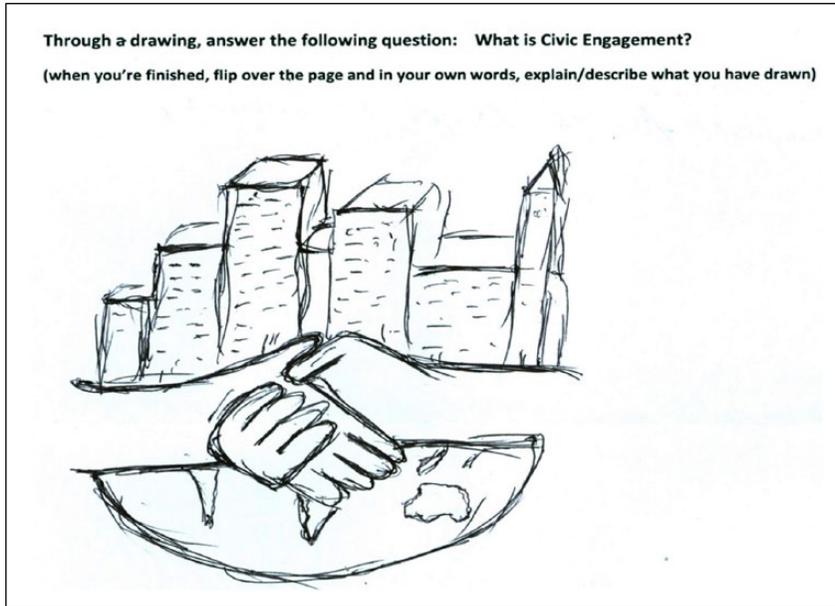

Figure 2. Business faculty student drawing sample 2.

Our description – Figure 2 incorporates significant detail and fits with the storytelling approach proposed by Hall (2008). The drawing depicts a cityscape with joined hands superimposed on a globe. It depicts joint responsibility at a city level and a global level for civic engagement. There is an indication of the integration of theory and practice in the drawing (McDrury and Alterio, 2004) as is captured by the phrase, coined by community organiser Saul Alinsky, 'think global, act local' (Barash and Webel, 2013: 540).

Learner's narrative – engaging locally will ultimately help globally. When people at local level co-operate, it is beneficial for the larger community.

Collective interpretation – many students found this drawing useful in depicting civic engagement. The global context was an important feature in the class discussion, as were the hands joined in a united pose. Student discussion included the importance of local activity building towards global impact. This is a case where an efficient image is making a detailed and complex argument (Chaffee, 2008).

Engineering faculty student drawings

Our description – Figure 3 shows people working on a building site (wearing hard hats as per health and safety requirements) talking to each other. The drawing has a narrative element and falls into the storytelling approach (Gardner, 1980; Hall, 2008). We recognise that the drawing highlights the 'engineering student narrative' of its creator, which reflects their personal observations and perceptions (Malchiodi, 1998). The top of the drawing includes the globe which might represent workers from different countries communicating on site.
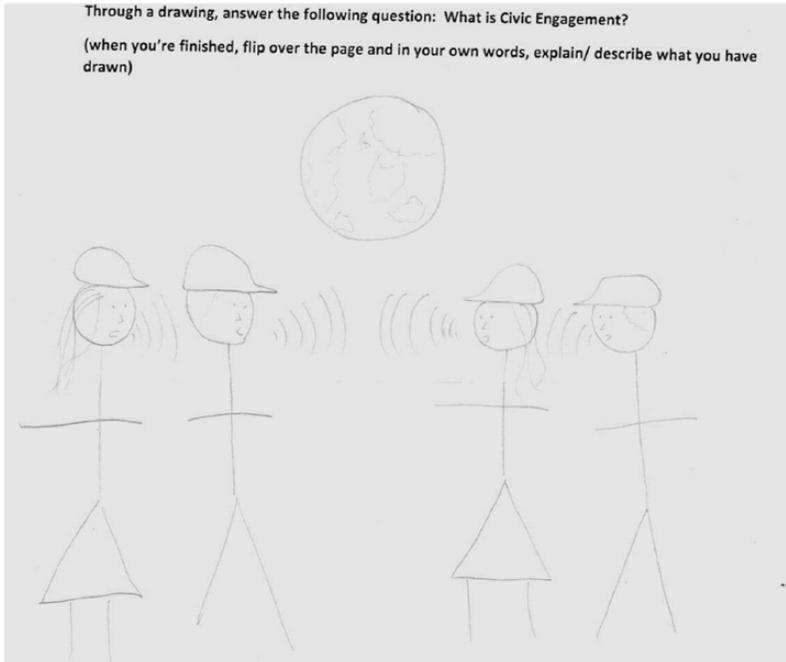
Figure 3. Engineering faculty student drawing sample 1.

Learner's narrative – the drawing represents different cultures and different areas of work (structural, electrical, architect, etc.), all working together to produce a final project outcome.

Collective interpretation – the class viewed this drawing as representing a typical exchange of ideas in a typical workplace, where professionals of different backgrounds and professions work together on a construction site. There was an interesting class discussion about what the student intended to convey about different cultures and professions interacting on a project.

Our description – Figure 4 shows a drawing of three hands, each with a single word attached, coming together to achieve a common goal. The three words, 'MAKE A DIFFERANCE [*sic*]' lead to a single goal. This drawing demonstrates the storytelling approach with a narrative element as proposed by Hall (2008). It is an interesting insight into how this student interprets 'civic engagement' to mean establishing a common goal (Tharinger and Roberts, 2014).

Learner's narrative – the drawing represents people uniting for a single goal.

Collective interpretation – the class found this drawing compelling due to the simplicity of having three hands, each with a single word by way of an explanation of what civic engagement means. The class agreed that it was important to have a single, common goal depicted in the drawing. This drawing is indicative of the self-awareness and open-mindedness that characterises critical thinking associated with images (Cordell, 2016; Donnelly and Hogan, 2013).

Figure 4. Engineering faculty student drawing sample 2.

Science faculty student drawings

Figure 5. Science faculty student drawing sample 1.

Our description – Figure 5 shows a chain of people holding hands while standing atop the world and fits with the storytelling approach proposed by Hall (2008). The drawing depicts shared responsibility at a global level for civic engagement.

Learner's narrative – Civic engagement means getting the world to work together in various different ways in order to improve quality of life, resources and to ensure equality to all. By working together we can improve standards and help prevent war and fighting. By getting people from all walks of life we can try to improve many problems in our world and also in businesses this idea can be useful. Therefore I drew a picture of the world with people on it to emphasise that we need to work together in order to bring about change.

Collective interpretation – this drawing was generated in an all-female class. In the discussion, the learners were happy that the world was depicted and that people were holding hands across the globe. The drawing generated a lot of discussion about the collegiality of civic engagement, shared responsibility, and the shared willingness of students to become more actively involved in civic and community activities.
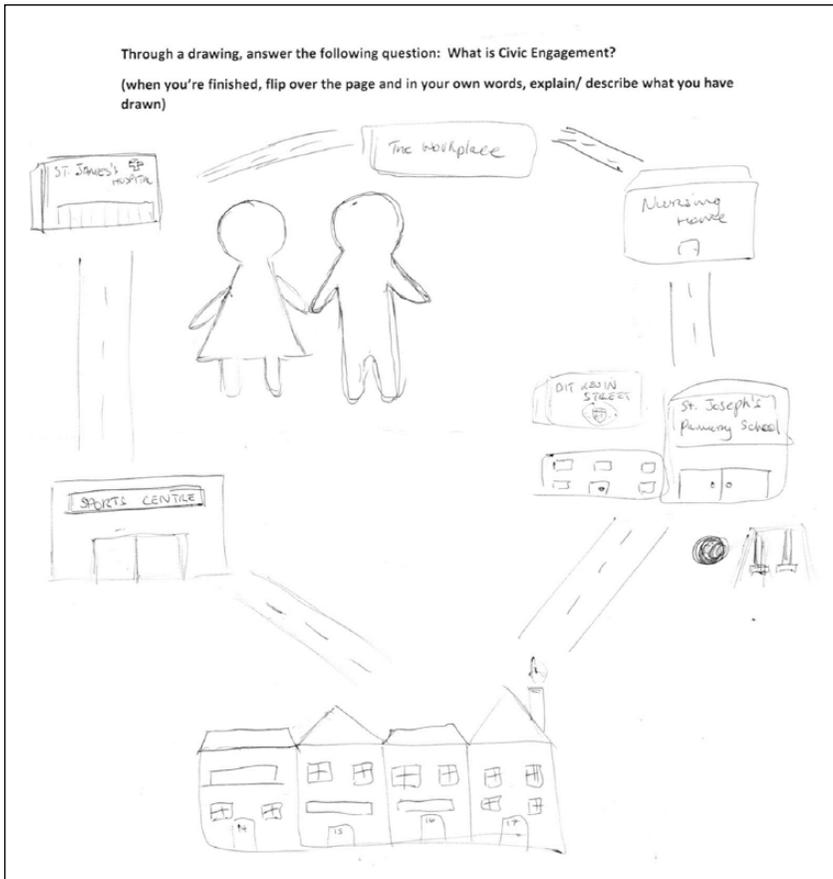

Figure 6. Science faculty student drawing sample 2.

Our description – Figure 6 depicts significant detail, showing six different contexts for the learner's understanding of civic engagement. Again, this drawing fits with the storytelling approach, with a narrative element, as proposed by Hall (2008). The drawing starts with two people, a male and a female, and moves through a depiction of a workplace, onto a nursing home. From there the road continues to a primary school and a college, and then on to a streetscape, through a sports centre and finishes at a hospital.

Learner's narrative – Civic engagement is where all members of society are allowed to engage with all other members of society (through all walks of life) and with their surrounding environment in a safe, equal and civil way. The diagram depicts the person (male or female) being at the centre of a community and interacting with others in their environment for personal growth and development (what I feel is a basic human right for people and should be accessible for all). It depicts connections and interactions between people, businesses and industries.

Collective interpretation – students queried why the drawing included a nursing home, a school, a college, and a hospital. The drawing facilitated a rich discussion about civic engagement incorporating all aspects of life, the professional and personal. This reinforces the positive value of using images to generate discussion and to facilitate greater meaning being attributed to terms such as 'civic engagement'. In addition, the discussion facilitated students demonstrating their ability to think and discuss in a more critical and well-informed manner than was usual for class based activities (Zull, 2011).

Pedagogical implications

There are numerous ways the higher education curriculum in Ireland has provided students with learning opportunities for their moral and civic development. Service-learning and learning in the community through community links projects have given some opportunities. Such community based learning is about an individual being a part of the community, working together to solve problems (Blosser, 2012). Our use of drawings, and the interpretation that occurs as part of the in-class discussion, can generate a sophisticated understanding of the world (Dehler et al., 2004), 'where students can challenge prevailing assumptions' (Smith, 2003: 21). However, it must be recognised that with this method what can be made of the data is bound up in the means of its production (Radley et al., 2010). As with surveys, interviews, and focus groups, participants may not be truthful, or accurate, and might instead draw the most extreme images they can (Dean, 2015). But, this can be diffused by the explanations participants provide on the reverse of their drawings and the in-class discussion.

Although often basic and superficial, when we pressed the students in their thinking on interpreting their drawings during the in-class discussion, they began to recognise, and cautiously query, their own and others' conjectures. Examining drawings and their ambiguity, through discursive interaction, highlights complexity and creates the possibility of richer thinking and expression that is otherwise restricted by relational and contextual custom in the classroom environment (Davison et al., 2012). Thus, freehand drawing, employed in conjunction with image interpretation and discussion, can promote reflexive engagement to produce varied viewpoints. In allowing students to convey visually what can be challenging to verbalise, drawings permit us to participate in a dialectical interaction with them wherein we can complicate their understanding and develop their aptitude

for critical self-reflection. The process of drawing elucidates further the preconceived ideas about civic engagement, proving a foundation upon which to build critique (Thomson, 2008). In so doing, we are creating a learning space where all are on the same epistemological ground.

After participating in the exercise, some students discovered that they had a good basic appreciation of civic engagement, despite having never studied the subject. They recognised that they had gained an understanding from their environment and the media. However, many others still could not understand the significance of civic engagement. Clearly, students have an understanding and interpretation of what civic engagement means, but struggle when trying to contextualise that meaning into every day social and civic experience, particularly at the level of individual responsibility. Nevertheless, they recognise that by cooperating in critically examining each other's drawings, they could identify aspects of, and nuances in, their understanding of civic engagement. The fact that these students have not taken a course on civic engagement, yet have an understanding of, and empathy for, the topic, suggests that it is crucial for HEIs to promote civic engagement as part of their culture (Goddard, 2009).

For a country recovering from an economic crisis, an engaged citizenry, that is capable of contributing to rebuild its economy, is important. We feel that this approach, in encouraging students to reflect critically, contributes to developing the kind of engaged citizenry vital for a flourishing and self-critical democracy. The approach also surmounts the long-term bias in instructional pedagogies towards oversimplification (Dehler et al., 2004) and the favouring of propositional knowledge (Heron and Reason, 1997), as it allows students to appreciate that there are many ways to comprehend, contest, and analyse issues. Our use of freehand drawing, therefore, is intended to address the calls by Bartunek et al. (1983) for 'developing complicated understanding', and by Dehler et al. (2004) for creating richer complexities in critical thinking that serve to question what is presented as being the only acceptable viewpoint (Stepanovich, 2009: 726).

The principles of best practice for a pedagogy of civic engagement include active learning, learning as a social process, contextual knowledge, reflexive practice, and the ability to represent an idea in a variety of contexts (Welch, 2007). The traditional approach is classroom based lectures, and focused upon the development of personally responsible citizens, while the alternative is a service-learning model emphasising a justice-oriented conception of citizenship (DeLaet, 2015). In this respect, our use of images possesses great value, as they have the potential to economically encode significant quantities of complex information (Ridley and Rogers, 2010). In seeking to create a space for nuance and ambiguity in the classroom using drawings, we complicate students' understanding through moving away from certainty towards an acceptance of ambiguity and paradox, complexity rather than simplicity (Zohar, 1997).

Conclusion

Employing freehand drawing to promote a dialectical exchange with students about civic engagement – to cultivate their capacity for critical self-reflection – allows them to put into visuals a level of comprehension that is sometimes difficult to articulate in words. The presentation of information visually can enable students to access unrecognised insights and make sense of complex issues by employing a whole brain approach. Students, employing the higher order thinking that is integral to visualisation, can define their knowledge of a topic that is universally understandable and rich in content.

'Through their ambiguity, visuals open up complexity' and 'generate richer thinking and expression, otherwise curtailed by power relations and contextual custom' (Davison et al., 2012: 8). Such a 'performative approach to the visual', as that offered by freehand drawing, 'invite[s] multiple and reflexive engagements with our own incomplete, open-ended and maybe paradoxical written performance in order to make audible the alternative readings and voices' (Steyaert et al., 2012: 49). Freehand drawing can be used to embody the students' experience of civic engagement that is available for reflection by themselves and others (Broussine, 2008).

That the students discuss the drawings as a group, in which every voice is heard, encourages interpretations from multiple perspectives and gives students and professors an opportunity to challenge theories/presumptions/beliefs. This approach can raise questions about what is being viewed and aids reflection on the wider context. The objective of such critical pedagogies should be to produce questioning citizens capable of self-reflection and willing to question widely held beliefs.

Our aim in using this approach, with final year degree students from the sciences and humanities, was to compare and contrast their understanding of civic engagement, a topic that is transdisciplinary. The activity involved the learners representing through freehand drawings their personal, non-verbal, interpretation of what they understood civic engagement to mean. All the drawings were initially examined quantitatively, before a sample of six were presented to see if they represented a discipline biased conceptualisation of civic engagement.

We found that there was an awareness of civic engagement among the participating business, science, and engineering students, but there was no evidence of a discipline biased understanding. This study does not support the theory that discipline matters regarding narrative, constructionism, or reflexivity. We found that all the drawings (n=63) were similar in using a narrative approach, regardless of the core discipline studied by their creators. We also found that there is still some work to do in building sustainable competencies and enthusiasm in students to take a more active role in civic engagement activities. It is interesting that all the drawings produced involved third parties. It was also not that surprising that some business students conflated civic engagement with CSR. Nevertheless, this conflation occurred despite many HEIs having included a civic purpose, or mission, in their vision and mission statements and there has been a marked increase in their forging links with community and society groups in an attempt to build on the civic and community engagement purpose.

Many implications can be identified from this study. Describing civic engagement pictorially forced the participants to think about what civic engagement is, for them, at its essence. The images produced showed that the participants absorbed a significant amount of knowledge and understanding of civic engagement from the world around them. With Waltz (1979) defining theory as a picture that is mentally formed of a bounded realm, the students were, through their drawings, creating their own theories of civic engagement. But, there is the need to further support and encourage students to participate in creating a culture of 'engaged scholarship' to facilitate further partnership, collaboration, knowledge sharing, and knowledge transfer, as well as sharing of resources between academic and civic communities. HEIs need to recognise that including civic engagement as part of their mission does not necessarily translate into programme level outcomes for their student body. We need to invigorate the student body to appreciate that higher education goes beyond preparing for the labour market; it is about preparing to be active, responsible, and civically engaged citizens. However, we will not create engaged citizens through

teaching alone; we need to continue to create an environment where there is mutual appreciation of and respect for differing traditions, identities, and communities through the employment of service-learning and civic engagement.

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