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What Stick Figures Tell Us about Irish Politics

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What stick figures tell us about Irish politics

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Figure 1

The student's narrative:

- Politicians: only want your money
- Closed doors: secrets and LIES
- Money and votes



What we interpret:

- Man = politician = corrupt
- Closed doors - concealed transactions; lack of openness and transparency
- Money and ballot box - suggestion of corruption

Origins

- Students not developing critical thinking/complex reasoning skills
- Vibrant democracy, engaged citizenry?
- Universities mass-producing status quo automatons?
- Drawings - a project to generate critical thinking
- Developing students as "critical beings" (Barnett, 1997) "capable of governing rather than simply being governed" (Giroux, 1997: 259)

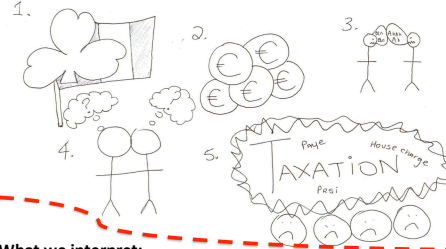
Where we come from

- 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

Figure 3

The student's narrative:

- Represents Ireland's image in the media and at public events
- Represents money, need help form the euro, part of Europe, free trade, etc.
- Debate on different topics to come up with solutions
- Make decisions
- Taxation and a lot of unhappy people



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

Figure 2

The student's narrative:

- Government pillaging citizens for every cent



What we interpret:

- Negative relationship between Ireland and EU
- Enlarged Irish government shaking money from citizens and EU collecting the money
- Other small EU stick men - other EU countries - approving

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

Figure 4

The student's narrative:

- Bertie - Rich; Brian Cowan - Dead; Enda Kenny - Prisoner;
- Germany - in control; Ireland - in ruins;
- Michael D. - Spectator, no wishes left, no control



What we interpret:

- Many details - depth of feelings - sense of social and economic crisis
- Belief that economy and politics are inextricably linked
- Former politicians either dead or corrupt; current PM a prisoner; President a ghost
- Germany receives the money from Ireland

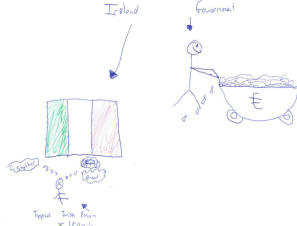
Interpreting the drawings

- Reflect the learners' personal understanding and experiences
- Many approaches to analysing learner-generated drawings
 - ❖ *Storytelling* - drawings - there is a narrative element (Gardner, 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

Figure 5

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 we interpret:

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

Figure 6

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
- All he says is "I don't know"
- Sense of uncertainty and confusion

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 cronyism 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?

Figure 7

The student's narrative:

- Government (rich people) taking poor people's money through different laws



What we interpret:

- The large figure (authority or the state) is holding a box of money
- The smaller figure (ordinary citizen or disenfranchised) is begging or alternatively putting money into the box

Contact us

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