What Stick Figures Tell Us about Irish Politics

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Recommended Citation


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What stick figures tell us about Irish politics

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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 conyngham 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?

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

The student's narrative:

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

What we interpret:

- 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" (Giroux, 1997)

Origins

- Enlarged Irish government shaking money from citizens and EU collecting the money
- Other small EU stick men – other EU countries – approving

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 (Guiraud, 1981)
- 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 crying 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

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