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

Figure 1
The student’s narrative:
- Politicians: only want your money
- Money and votes
- Man = politician = corrupt
- Financial autonomy
- Germany receives the money from Ireland
- Former politicians either dead or corrupt; current PM a prisoner;
- A negative attitude towards the EU
- Taxation and a lot of unhappy people
- Money and ballot box – suggestion of corruption

Figure 2
The student’s narrative:
- Government pillaging citizens for every cent
- Other small EU stick men – other EU countries – approving

Figure 3
The student’s narrative:
- Ireland’s image in the media and at public events
- Money and votes
- Sense of powerlessness and inaction
- A negative attitude towards the EU
- Money and ballot box – suggestion of corruption

Figure 4
The student’s narrative:
- Bertie – Rich; Brian Cowen – Dead; Enda Kenny – Prisoner;
- Germany – in control; Ireland – in ruins;
- Michael D. – Spectator, no wishes left, no control
- Germany receives the money from Ireland

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

Figure 6
The student’s narrative:
- An illustration of an endless series of questions to our political leaders, with no answers in return

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 cronynism 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?

What we interpret:

- Money and ballot box – suggestion of corruption

What we interpret:

- Government pillaging citizens for every cent
- 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 been 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 debate of class
  - Rapporteur noted on flipchart sheets; opened floor for discussion

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