Utilising Personal Construct Psychology and the Repertory Grid Interview method to meaningfully represent the Voice of the Child in their social relationships.

Abstract

Since the ratification of the 1981 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) the role of Voice of the Child (VoC) in education has gained significance. Despite various VoC models and methods existing to collect and understand it, it is often critiqued for being tokenistic, rather than meaningful. Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) is a relevant psychological theory which provides a range of methods for exploring VoC. Previous PCP research has utilised art methods to explore primary school pupil's views about various aspects of their educational experience (Maxwell, 2006; Maxwell, 2015). The current research sought to extend the application of PCP to explore VoC by employing the repertory grid interview method to represent and understand a sample of Year Five pupils' opinions and perspectives on their social relationships. The repertory grid interview method was proposed as a method that would lead to meaningful rather than tokenistic VoC.

The findings demonstrated that participants had a strong sense of self in relation to others and reported positive social relationships. Relationships with family members were found to be the most reported and hypothesised to be the most important relationships in participant's social worlds. Participants predominantly utilised the construct categories of 'extroverted / introverted', 'pleasant / unpleasant' and 'sympathetic / unsympathetic' with regards to their social relationships and interactions. These findings are discussed in relation to the argument that repertory grid interviews offer a meaningful rather than tokenistic method for engaging in VoC. Limitations and implications for future research and professional practice are also discussed.

Key words: Voice of the Child, Personal Construct Psychology, Repertory Grid, social relationships, student voice, pupil voice, childhood friendships

Introduction

Voice of the Child

The role of the Voice of the Child (VoC) in education has increased in importance since the UK ratified the 1981 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Broadly, VoC has been taken to mean any action by adults involving collection and consideration of the opinions and perceptions of children and young people (Gersch, 2013; Ingram, 2013; Lundy & Cook-Sather, 2016). It has been presented as a positive development, one rooted in emancipation and equality (Gersch, 2013; Harding & Atkinson, 2009). However, various models of VoC and children and young people participation stress that the collection of opinions and perceptions is not enough to be classed as meaningful engagement; the keen adoption of VoC has been critiqued on these grounds (Lewis, 2010; Lundy, 2007; Lundy & Marshall, 2015).When considering the importance and application of VoC as a concept, such criticisms are worth exploring.

Tokenistic versus meaningful involvement of children and young people in their education is central to most academic critiques of VoC. Tokenism was first postulated by Arnstein (1979) in her Ladder of Participation, where tokenism is any form of inclusion of the typical 'have nots' in decision making processes that is employed to appease and pacify them, rather than a genuine interest in their involvement. This is contrasted with meaningful involvement, which falls at the top of Arnstein's (1979) metaphorical ladder. This is where voice leads to action as the 'have nots' are given equal power in decision making processes. Similarly, Lundy's (2007) VoC model delineates four dynamics of *space*, *voice*, *audience* and *influence*. The latter two of *audience* and *influence* centralise the importance of meaningful involvement as they state that the child should be listened to by appropriate adults for the context (*audience)* and views must be

acted on (*influence).* As such, tokenistic approaches to VoC are viewed negatively and meaningful involvement is achieved via the action and change VoC leads to.

However, this view has been challenged. Hart (2008) positioned the ladder model of participation as a metaphor that does not acknowledge the wide range of ways that children participate in different communities. This ladder metaphor is readily applicable to adult led programs and projects, such as formal schooling, but is not as applicable to other more complex spaces that children occupy such as the home and shared public space, like a playground. There is an irony at play here where by the ladder metaphor, originally intended to promote a movement away from tokenism, has by its very conceptualisation metaphysically ring-fenced regulated spaces within which VoC can only be considered.

Despite the poignancy of such a critique, it can be argued that it plays into a black and white, all or nothing, view of VoC and involvement of children and young people in their education; it is either good or bad, it should be meaningful or else it is useless. Lundy (2018) presents a nuanced view where a tokenistic approach to VoC can be positive, so long as it acts as a stepping stone to meaningful involvement. It is argued that this if often the typical genesis of genuine involvement of the views of children and young people in their education by educational professionals. This is supported by research conducted by Mullholland (2014) who interviewed teachers beginning to explore VoC with their pupils. It was found that the concept developed and evolved differently within each school context, with a general pattern of beginning as a 'tick box exercise' and moving towards collaboration and compromise.

Alternatively, Lewis (2010) takes a radical approach to critiquing VoC and appraises tokenism from a different angle, claiming that the pro-voice climate resultant of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) led to a practitioner rush to engage in listening to

children. Whilst on the surface this may appear to be positive, Lewis (2010) contends that this raises ethical considerations. VoC is said to have fallen into a consumerist framework for collecting opinion where feedback is only valid if used to develop a product or service that can be re-sold to the individual (Lewis, 2010). As such, VoC in education is not concerned with implementing the views of children for moral reasons of equality, but improving educational service based on feedback. VoC processes are said to prime children to be engaged consumers in a capitalist society; it is wholly tokenistic and a contentious ethical issue because of this. As an antidote, Lewis (2010) coined the concept of 'silence in child voice' where children have the right to withdraw from VoC processes, non-participation being a democratic act.

Lewis's (2010) so-called 'pro-voice rush' is evident in the body of educational research concerned with developing appropriate methods for collecting and understanding VoC. A wide range of methods have been trialed. Underpinning these methods is the need for approaches to be child centered and engaging. For this reason, research has investigated active methods for engaging VoC such as drawing and drama (Eldén, 2013; Hammond, 2013). However, Todd (2003) contends that in actual practice only basic methods are used, such as asking children and young people what they like and dislike by prompting them with 'I like' statements. This is supported by research conducted by Harding and Atkinson (2009) who found the main way educational psychologists gathered VoC was to ask children their views, rather than employing creative, dynamic methods. Todd (2003) feels that this does not allow for children to understand the purpose of the activity and doesn't allow access to what decisions are made about them.

This demonstrates how methods to collect and understand VoC are closely aligned to the critical debate of tokenistic versus meaningful engagement, with some methods enabling more meaningful involvement than others. This is supported by research which has shown that when

children and young people are directly asked their views through a conversation method, limited information is elicited as they feel 'put on the spot' and don't know what to say (Armstrong, 1995; Hobbs, Todd & Taylor, 2000). Linked to this debate is a question of representing children's perceptions as precisely as possible; to what extent does the chosen method collect opinions and views that sensitively represent the child's experience? Therefore, to enable practitioners to engage in meaningful VoC practice, methods are needed that are both engaging but also provide a theoretical framework for sensitive representation of the child's word via the collection of precise data close to the child's experience of the world.

This paper puts forth Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) as one such theory and explores use of the repertory grid interview method as one such method. Based on Hart's (2008) critique that VoC research and practice has traditionally considered only adult controlled spaces, such as school, and has made a tokenistic neglect of child led spaces, such as social play and interactions, the research employed the PCP repertory grid interview method to represent and explore a sample of Year Five primary school children's views and perceptions about their social interactions and friendships with others. In the following sections, PCP and the repertory gird interview method are outlined and previous PCP research into VoC in social relationships explored. This is followed by the research aims and research questions.

Personal Construct Psychology as theory and method for Voice of the Child

Kelly (1955) theorised that individuals act as scientists, making predictions about the world based on their current perception and understanding of it, which is continually altered according to experience. Future events are anticipated, and responses planned in accordance with what is termed an individual's 'model of the world', which is their particular perception and comprehension of events. This is the central premise of PCP.

Within PCP, the ‘construct system’ is the theorised mechanism that represents a person’s ‘model of the world’ (Bannister & Fransella, 2013; Fransella & Dalton, 2000). A ‘construct system’ is made up of numerous ‘constructs’, the smallest theoretical unit for knowing something about the world and making an interpretation of it to form a presumption of how things are. Constructs are binary and possess two polar points such as ‘happy / sad’ or ‘good / bad’ (Bannister & Fransella, 2013; Fransella & Dalton, 2000). Constructs relate to other constructs in a network of relations where some are subordinate to others (Feixas & Saul, 2004)

Ingram (2013) critiques the application of dominant psychological theories (e.g. psychodynamic and cognitive / behavioural) for VoC collection and interpretation as they assume a mismatch between an individual perception of the situation and the actual objective reality of the situation. In a therapeutic context, the purpose of collecting the views of the client is to explore thinking errors and distortions and so correct them (Hawton, Salkovskis, Kirk & Clark, 1989). Therefore, application of theory starts from a point of assuming the individual’s perception of an experience is incorrect, and by extension invalid, and so is not fit for the purpose of exploring or representing their voice. The central ‘model of the world’ premise of PCP and the construct system differs to this. PCP theory starts from the assumption that individual’s build their own distinct, personal understanding of reality from the perspective of their own experiences, which is therefore valid. As such, it offers an appropriate psychological theory to represent and understand the deep complexity of children’s perceptions and views, gleaned from exploring their experiences from their perspective only.

With regards to childhood social relationships, PCP would posit that each individual child develops their own set of constructs for predicting and responding to social interactions and developing relationships (Fransella, 2003). As each individual's experience is unique the

individual's constructions of their social interactions and relationships will be nuanced. Therefore, how they anticipate and respond to social events are a result of their previous social experiences and the constructs they have developed as a result (Fransella, 2003). In addition, the 'sociality corollary' to PCP theory states that individuals interact with each other by construing the constructions of others (Fransella, 2003; Fransella & Dalton, 2000). They perceive that others have an interpretation of the world separate from their own and attempt to understand the actions of others by inferring their constructs (Fransella, 2003; Fransella & Dalton, 2000).

Research exploring constructs held about social relationships has mostly been conducted with university students (Cochrane, 1981; Duck, 1972; Duck & Spencer, 1972; Leichty, 1989; Neimeyer & Neimeyer, 1986; Kilon & Leitner, 1991). A search of the literature revealed two papers by Maxwell (2006) and Maxwell (2015) which provide good examples of research that utilises PCP to explore children's perceptions of their experiences at school. Both studies asked pupils about their experiences of school more generally but found that one of the significant experiences that children chose to represent and examine was their social interactions and relationships with peers. Constructs regarding social relationships were of particular importance to the participants. Both pieces of research used artistic and creative methods.

Maxwell (2006) asked 13 primary school children recorded as being on the school's Special Educational Needs (SEN) register to complete four drawings of themselves in school. Each pupil was then interviewed twice using a "PCP conversation style" (Maxwell, 2006, pg. 22) which aimed to reveal the salient issues to the participant. The findings revealed that important relationships centered on peer and friendship interactions rather than teacher and pupil interactions. Pupils expressed a desire to be included in peer group interactions but felt that they could be deliberately rejected. Other significant themes related to peer conflict and resolution, as

well as problem solving in relationships; participants spoke about seeking help from others, both practical and emotional, and offering support to others.

These findings were supported and developed further by Maxwell's (2015) investigation of the views and constructions of an expanded sample of 72 Y5 pupils. Participants were asked to draw a picture of themselves 'happy' whilst at school and a picture of themselves 'sad' whilst at school. As with the previous research, pupils placed a weighted emphasis on the importance of their social interactions and relationships with peers. 96 out of the 149 pictures generated denoted a social scene. In addition, PCP has been successfully used in research investigating children's constructions of a wide variety of topics such as, meta-cognition, nature, co-teaching, self-image, starting school and experiences of exclusion (Adams, 2012; Beattie, 2014; Einarsdottir, Dockett & Perry, 2009; Pezzica, Pinto, Bigozzi & Vezzani, 2015; Thomas, Butler, Hare & Green 2011).

The aim of the current research was to extend this application of PCP to VoC for social relationships by trialing the repertory grid interview method as an alternative to creative / artistic methods. Repertory grids enable a precise definition of constructs to occur, which is not as readily developed with drawing methods (Fransella, Bell, & Bannister, 2004). In addition, the structure and process of the repertory grid interview method allows relationships among elements to be explored as based on the ratings of constructs for each element. This means that relationships between elements can be investigated to provide an overall picture or 'feel' of the participants' perceptions of their social world.

Whilst this arguably doesn't enable 'rich' data, such as with the work of Maxwell (2006; 2015), it was hypothesized that it would allow for meaningful data to be generated in a precise way. This has practice implications as busy teachers who don't have the time for in-depth qualitative

interviews require a VoC method that is quick to administer but not tokenistic. The potential for an overall feel of pupil's perceptions responding to this need.

The research questions were as follows:

How do Year Five pupils construe their social interactions and relationships with their family, friends and peers?

How do the Year Five participants construe their sense of self?

How do the Year Five participants construe themselves in relation to others?

Method

Methodology

The research was positioned within an interpretivist framework, adopting a social constructionist approach to reality (Burr, 2015; Ormston, Spencer, Barnard & Snape, 2014). This framework was deemed appropriate for the use of PCP methods as it posits that 'truth' about the topic being explored is co-constructed by research and participants via the methods employed.

Participants and setting

An opportunity sampling method was used. Parents were asked to give consent for their children to be interviewed; out of 32 parents approached eight parents gave consent for their child to be interviewed. Each participant also gave their own additional consent to participate. Three of the children were female and five were male. Participant's ages ranged from 9 to 10 with the mean age being 10. All participants were members of the same Year Five class in a mainstream school. The interviews took place in a small, quiet room in the school and lasted between 30 minutes to an hour.

Language was not deemed to be a barrier for the participants who engaged in the repertory grid interviews. None of the participants were reported to have special educational needs or developmental difficulties with language.

The participants were not known to the researcher prior to the interviews.

Repertory Grid Interview procedure

The chosen method for eliciting and exploring participants' constructs was the repertory grid interview method (Kelly, 1955). The repertory grid interview method allows the elicitation of participants' constructs by encouraging them to consider aspects of their self and others and then offers the opportunity for participants to rate themselves and others on the grid regarding the aspects of self (constructs) they have developed (Winter, 1992). Repertory grids are made up of four components of the topic, the elements, the constructs and the ratings. The structure and process of the repertory grid interview method allows relationships among elements to be explored as based on the ratings of constructs for each element.

Topic

The topic of the grid is the subject matter that the interviewer or interviewee wishes to explore. The topic will seek to reference some element of a person's experience.

The topic of the repertory grid interview was directed by the researcher as it was important for the research that it should be linked to the focus of social interactions and relationships with others. The topic was described to participants as "friendships and social behaviours".

Elements

Elements are individual items that provide instances of the topic. For example, if the topic is ‘family’ then a set of references to family that form the elements may be ‘mother’, ‘father’, ‘sister’, ‘brother’, ‘cousin’ etc. Typically, elements are used to generate constructs.

The following elements were provided by the researcher:

- How I am now
- How I was
- How I would like to be
- How I wouldn’t like to be
- Best friend (in Y5 class)

Elements related to self were chosen as past research had highlighted the important role of self in individuals’ construing of their social interactions and relationships with others (Cipolletta, 2011). The best friend element was chosen as it focused the participant on a close social relationship they had in their class of peers. Participants were then given the option of independently choosing up to 5 additional elements. Participants were directed to pick people who they knew and had some form of relationship with.

Participants were not limited by the context within which they knew these people. This was so that they would be free to pick individuals not just from their class but from their social world more broadly. It was felt that this was less constricting and would allow for constructions that were more meaningful to the participants’ social world to emerge. Typically, additional elements were family members and peers they identified as friends. The final list of elements was assessed to make sure that they were discrete and did not overlap.

Constructs

Constructs consist of basic terms which the interviewee uses to make sense of their experience of the world. Each construct consists of two poles, the desirable pole and its contrast, such as, ‘good / bad’. On the repertory grid the two sides of the construct poles are placed either side of the elements so that the elements can be rated against the constructs. A Likert scale is typically used to achieve this so that each element is rated against the preferred or non-preferred pole of the construct. This is done for each construct that is relevant to the element so its meaning for the interviewee is captured and expressed.

To elicit the participants’ constructs Kelly's (1955) original triadic methodology was employed. The elements were first written down on individual pieces of card. Three element cards were presented to the individual and the question asked, "in what way are two of these alike and one different". To focus the participants’ construing towards the topic of social interactions and relationships the question was expanded to reference social interaction. For example, the question was phrased in the following ways: "In what way are two of these people alike and one different in the way that they interact with others"? "In what way are two of these people alike and one different in terms of their friendships with people"?

The answer was written down as an emergent pole. A contrast pole was then elicited by asking the question "in what way is the third one different from the other two?" This process was repeated with different element card combinations until enough bipolar constructs had been recorded. Constructs were placed on the repertory grid by asking the participant to say which pole was preferred and which pole was non-preferred.

In some instances, the ‘laddering’ technique was additionally employed to further explore emergent constructs. ‘Laddering’ involves taking an emergent construct pole and asking, ‘how come’. By asking this question repeatedly a hierarchy of answers emerge. Answers at the top of

the hierarchy, or 'ladder', are presumed to more sensitively reflect 'core' constructs (Korenini, 2014). These constructs are then used.

Ratings

Participants were then invited to rate each element on a 7- point Likert scale for each of their constructs. They were given access to a picture of a 7-point Likert scale to aid the rating activity. If required, the construct poles were written on additional cards and placed at the appropriate ends of the visual aid.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearing for the research was granted by the University of Birmingham's ethics research panel.

Findings and analysis

IdioGrid software version 2.4 was used to analyse the data (www.idiogrid.com). Each research question is presented with the accompanying analysis method and rationale.

How do Year Five pupils construe their social interactions and relationships with their family, friends and peers?

Content analysis of participants' constructs was chosen as the analysis method for exploring how participants construe their social interactions and relationships (Green, 2004). Content analysis was chosen because it facilitates the identification and analysis of patterns and themes in the data. In this way information about the topic of investigation can be meaningfully organised. As a result, an understanding of how participants as a group were construing the topic of social interactions and relationships with others was developed.

The Content Analysis Category System (CACS) developed by Feixas, Geldschläge and Neimeyer (2002) was used to categorise each construct. The CACS compromises forty five categories divided into six overall themes of moral, emotional, relational, personal, intellectual / operational and values / interests. The themes and their categories are summarised in appendix one. The 'Moral' theme contains common constructs that relate to moral and ethical interpretations and behaviors. The 'emotional' theme contains common constructs that relate to typical interpretations of feelings and affective experiences. The 'relational' theme contains common constructs that reference and predict our social interactions with others. The 'personal' theme contains common constructs that describe facets of personality. The 'intellectual / operational' theme contains common constructs that relate to notions of ability and achievement. The 'values / interests' them contains common constructs that relate to ideological interpretations of the world.

To test reliability a second rater independently used the Feixas, Geldschläger and Neimeyer's (2002) classification system to categorise the same constructs. Inter-rater reliability was calculated by dividing the number of agreements by the number of disagreements and multiplying this number by 100. This gave an agreement of 96% which was judged to confirm a high level of inter-rater reliability.

Out of the six main possible categories of Feixas, Geldschläger and Neimeyer's (2002) classification system, 5 (83%) were found to be applicable. Of the 45 possible subcategories, 14 (31%) were found to be applicable. The most commonly occurring were extroverted / introverted (29%) and pleasant / unpleasant (25%). Table one shows the frequency and percentages of Feixas, Geldschläger and Neimeyer's (2002) categories as applied to the constructs drawn from participants' grids. Categories that did not receive any ratings are not included.

Main category	**Sub-category**	**Frequency of construct poles**	**Percentage**
Relational	Extroverted / introverted	14	29%
	Pleasant / unpleasant	12	25%
	Sympathetic / unsympathetic	4	8%
	Personal others	2	4%
	Relational others	1	2%
	Visceral / rational	1	2%
	Tolerant / authoritarian	1	2%
Emotional	Balanced / unbalanced	4	8%
	Specific emotions	4	8%
	Warm / cold	1	2%
Values and interests	Values and specific interests	4	8%
Moral	Altruism / egoist	1	2%
Personal	Hard working / lazy	1	2%
Intellectual / operational	Active / passive	1	2%

Tabel 1: Content categories of participants' grid constructs

Of the 14 sub classifications within which the constructs fell, the majority belonged to the major categories of ‘relational’ and 'emotional'. The highly populated major category was 'relational' as five of the sub-categories of the 'relational' category were categorised with the highest proportion of constructs. Following this, four of the 'emotional' major category subcategories were categorised but with a much lower proportion to 'relational'. Within the 'relational' major category the two sub categories of 'extroverted / introverted' and 'pleasant / unpleasant' had a significantly larger portion of constructs compared to all other subcategories.

These findings suggest that participants tended to use relational constructs for construing their social interactions and relationships with peers. Also, of importance, was the use of emotional constructs. It appeared that of almost ubiquitous use were constructs that referred to how introverted to outgoing a person was and how pleasant or unpleasant they were to others.

How do the Year Five participants construe their sense of self?

Differences between how participants construed themselves in various contexts were explored in order to examine how participants construed their sense of self. The following differences were explored:

- The difference between the elements 'How I was' and 'How I am now' was explored to provide an examination of how participants’ constructions self had potentially changed over time.
- The difference between elements 'How I would like to be' and 'How I wouldn't like to be’ was explored to gain a picture of ideal self and non-ideal self.

- The element 'How I am now' was compared with the elements 'How I would like to be' and 'How I wouldn't like to be' to explore how participants' constructions of actual self compared with their construing of ideal self and non-ideal self.
- The element of 'How I was' was also compared with 'How I would like to be' and 'How I wouldn't like to be' to explore how participants' constructions of past actual self compared with their construing of ideal self.

Distances are a sensitive and appropriate way to measure associations across elements (Fransella, Bell & Bannister, 2004). They provide a way of exploring how similar or dissimilar two elements are when ratings across all constructs are considered. The chosen statistical method of analysis was euclidian distances as it provides an analysis of dissimilarities between scores. This type of analysis thus identified the elements that participants viewed as different to each other based on dissimilarly rated constructs.

Euclidian distances between significant elements are presented in Table 2. The smaller the Euclidian distance, the more similar the two elements are deemed to be. Likewise, the larger the Euclidian distance, the more different the two elements are deemed to be.

Participant	**Elements**	**How I am now**	**How I was**	**How I would like to be**	**How I wouldn't like to be**
1	How I am now		3.74	5.48	9.49
	How I was			6.48	6.78
	How I would like to be				11.22

	How I wouldn't like to be				
2	How I am now		2.64	3.16	10.58
	How I was			4.90	8.54
	How I would like to be				12.12
	How I wouldn't like to be				
3	How I am now		3.74	5.92	6.86
	How I was			8.66	3.87
	How I would like to be				12.00
	How I wouldn't like to be				
4	How I am now		3.16	3.16	12.17
	How I was			4.24	10.86
	How I would like to be				14.42
	How I wouldn't like to be				
5	How I am now		6.08	4.42	10.39
	How I was			6.24	10.82

	How I would like to be				11.58
	How I wouldn't like to be				
6	How I am now		3.00	3.00	11.96
	How I was			4.69	10.95
	How I would like to be				13.93
	How I wouldn't like to be				
7	How I am now		2.24	3.16	8.72
	How I was			4.12	7.81
	How I would like to be				10.95
	How I wouldn't like to be				
8	How I am now		4.47	8.06	4.58
	How I was			5.92	6.40
	How I would like to be				10.86
	How I wouldn't like to be				

Table 2: Euclidian analysis for relevant elements

When comparing the elements of 'How I would like to be' and 'How I wouldn't like to be', the analysis shows a trend across the eight participants where there is greater distance than similarity between the two elements. The range of Euclidian distance scores across the eight participants was 10.58 to 14.42, which represent large distances. This means that the participants' constructions of how they would like to be were contrasted against how they would not like to be. This finding has intuitive meaning as we would expect an individual's ideal of how they would want to be to contrast sharply with, or at least be different from, how they would not want to be. This suggests internal validity to the data.

When making the comparisons of 'How I am now' and 'How I was' to ideal and non-ideal self ('How I would like to be' and 'How I wouldn't like to be'), a similar trend in the data emerged across the eight participants' scores for both of these elements. Their perceptions of 'How I am now' and 'How I was' both tended to be close to their ideal self and dissimilar from their non-ideal self. This data gives rise to the interpretation that both the past view of self and the current view of self held by participant were closer to their ideal self and dissimilar from how they did not want to be. It appears that participants generally tended to construct themselves as close to their ideal self.

Examination of the differences between the comparisons of 'How I am now' and 'How I would like to be' and 'How I was' and 'How I would like to be' show a shift over time in the participants' construing of self. This shift was made in the direction towards 'How I would like to be' and away from 'How I wouldn't like to be'. The mean for distances between 'How I was' and 'How I would like to be' was 4.92. The mean for distances between 'How I am now' and 'How I would like to be' was 4.54. This shows a slight movement towards ideal self between 'How I was' and 'How I am now'. The only participant not to follow this trend was participant eight, whose ratings

positioned them as further away from their ideal self in terms of 'How I am now' in comparison to 'How I was'. The largest shift was constructed by participant three, whose elements of 'How I was' and 'How I would like to be' had a closeness of 8.66, and the elements of 'How I am now' and 'How I would like to be' had a closeness of 5.92, suggesting a movement towards ideal self over time.

Given that participants tended to construe both 'How I am now' and 'How I was' as similar to 'How I would like to be' it follows that 'How I am now' and 'How I was' were construed by participants' as being similar to each other. The range of Euclidian distance scores across the eight participants was 2.24 to 6.08. These represent small distances between the two elements. These findings suggest that as a general trend, participants construed themselves as being closer to their ideal self than their non-ideal self. They construed themselves as having made some positive movement towards their ideal self but as they see their past self as close to their ideal self they construed themselves as broadly similar to how they were in the past.

How do the Year Five participants construe themselves in relation to others?

The final research question sought to explore how individuals construing of themselves compared with how they construed others on the same constructs. This would provide a conceptual 'map' of their social world by developing patterns of an individual's construction of themselves as similar or dissimilar to others. Previous research demonstrated that individuals form close social relationships with those who they see as having similar constructs to themselves, and thus a perceived sense of similarity at the construct level is a fundamental element to successful social interactions and relationships with others (Duck, 1973; Neimeyer & Neimeyer, 1986). Thus, examining individuals construing of self in relation to significant others provides an opportunity to explore occasions for social similarity or dissimilarity.

As with the second research question, Euclidian distances was chosen as the statistical method as it would provide an analysis of dissimilarities between scores. It identified those who were most different to the participants and those who weren't. Comparisons were made between the element 'How I am now' and every element which identified another individual.

The Euclidian distances between the element 'How I am now' and all other elements relating to an individual other to them are presented in Table 3. Participant five was omitted from the final analysis for this research question as they did not wish to rate anyone other than their self during the repertory grid interview.

Participant	**Gender**	**Elements relating to an individual other than self**	**Element 'How I am now'**
1	F	Best friend	5.57
		Mum	5.83
		Dad	4.00
		Brother	2.24
2	M	Best friend	5.20
		Granddad	5.83
		Brother one	5.00
		Brother two	4.12
		Brother three	5.83
		Friend	3.16
3	F	Best friend	3.74
		Mum	5.92

4	F	Best friend	2.83
		Middle brother	3.00
		Younger brother	3.16
		Sister	3.46
		MMum	3.32
		Dad	1.14
5	M	Omitted	Omitted
6		Best friend	3.16
		Mum	3.16
		Dad	2.65
		Big brother	3.46
		Little brother	2.00
7	M	Best friend	3.32
		Mum	3.32
		Dad	2.65
		Brother one	3.32
		Brother two	4.80
		Best friend two	4.24
8	M	Best friend	4.00
		Little sister	6.00
		Mum	7.81
		Dad	5.29
		Cousin	5.57

Table 3: The Euclidian distances for the eight participants between the element 'How I am now' and all other elements relating to another individual.

The elements that participants chose can be scrutinised for their potential significance. From the range of elements chosen across all participants it appears that family members were the dominant group for element choice. This pattern in the data was observed for both genders. All participants chose family members only as additional elements, with participant seven and participant two choosing a second friend from their class in addition to family members. This finding indicates that when asked to create a picture of their social world by choosing significant others from it, the family unit became a strong reference point for the participants.

The analysis shows a general trend across participants whereby they construed themselves as similar to most family members. There was a high level of similarity across the analysis of participants who compared their constructs of siblings to their construct of 'How I am now'. The exception to this trend was participant eight where the Euclidian distance between their construction of 'How I am now' and construction of their 'Sister' was 6.00, which although not a large distance still constitutes a slight difference between the elements.

Similarities between constructions of 'How I am now' and 'Dad' were particularly close with a range of 1.14 – 5.29 and a mean of 3.15. Similarities were also found between 'How I am now' and 'Mum', although these did not appear to be as close as relations found between 'How I am now' and 'Dad', with the range of scores being 7.81-3.16 and a mean of 4.89. This trend mostly occurred for male participants, all of whom construed themselves as more like 'Dad' than 'Mum'. Two participants did not provide a comparison of either 'Dad' or 'Mum' (Participant Two who was male and Participant Three who was female) and so are exempt from a gender-based analysis. One female participant (Participant One) followed this trend. As such, there does

seem to be a potential gender bias with these constructions of similarity of 'How I am now' to 'Dad'.

Comparisons between 'How I am now' and elements constituting friends were also found to be similar with a range of 2.83 – 5.57 and a mean of 3.48. These findings give rise to the interpretation that as a general trend, participants tended to construct themselves similarly to how they constructed those whom they picked as having significance in their social circle. This creates a map of their social worlds where family are of central importance and those who are of importance are construed as similar to their selves.

Summary of findings

The eight pupils who participated in the PCP repertory grid interviews predominantly employed relational constructs when construing their social interactions and relationships with others. Constructs that fell into the relational categories of 'extroverted / introverted' and 'pleasant / unpleasant'. With regards to how participants typically appeared to construe their sense of self, the findings suggested that as a general trend, participants construed themselves as being closer to their ideal self than their non-ideal self. Past self was seen as being broadly similar to current self, as both were construed as being close to ideal self. One interpretation of this is that pupils possessed a positive self-identity. Participants appeared to choose family members over peers as their additional elements and typically construed themselves as like family members. A conclusion may be drawn that this indicates that the family unit was an important social reference for the participants and that they construed themselves as similar to their chosen others.

Discussion

The aim of the current study was to apply the PCP repertory grid interview method to VOC regarding their social relationships by trialing the method of repertory grid interview method. It was put forth that the repertory grid interview method would offer a method for meaningful collection of VoC as it provides data entirely led from the child's perspective.

How do Year Five pupils construe their social interactions and relationships with their family, friends and peers?

One interpretation of the popularity of constructs categorised of 'extroverted / introverted' and 'pleasant / unpleasant' is that the mannerisms of extroversion and pleasantness were important to most participants when regarding their social interactions and relationships with others. These categories are both references to psychological traits and attributes. PCP research has shown that when individuals are more familiar with a person they are more likely to construe them by utilising constructs of psychological attributes (Duck, 1973; Klion & Leitner, 1991). Conversely, when construing their social interactions and relationships with someone with whom they are less familiar they employ constructs that refer physical attributes and mannerisms (Duck, 1973; Kilon & Leitner, 1991).

One interpretation of this finding is that the two construct categories were repeatedly represented across the construing of participants as they are closely linked to core personality traits that are known to play a central role in successful relationships. The possession of personality traits of extroversion and agreeableness, which is arguably a synonym for pleasantness and therefore a similar construct, has been shown to mediate higher levels of satisfaction with social relationships (Tov, Nai & Lee, 2016; Asendorpf & Wilpers, 1998). People who are more extroverted and agreeable also perceive themselves to have a higher quality of social relationships (Lopes, Salovey & Straus (2003). Therefore, the prominent presence of these two

construct categories may reflect their significance as personality traits that mediate positive perceptions of social interactions and relationships.

How do the Year Five participants construe their sense of self?

As an overall trend, participants tended to construe themselves as close to their ideal self. One interpretation of this finding is that participants appeared to have a positive sense of self and were comfortable with how they were as a person. As most constructs referred to social interactions and relationships it is possible to infer that participants construed themselves positively in terms of their ability to interact socially and have positive relationships with others.

How do the Year Five participants construe themselves in relation to others?

Participants appeared to perceive their selves to be like others as rated on their own constructs. This finding is similar to the outcomes of Cipolletta (2011) who found that young people construed themselves as being more similar to family members than non-family members. This was interpreted to mean that participants identified more with family members. A similar interpretation may be drawn with the current findings as interestingly most participants chose family members for their choice of elements and construed themselves as like them. A conclusion of this is that participants made a strong identification with family members.

This finding differs from previous research conducted by Maxwell (2006) and Maxwell (2015) which found that primary school pupils made more references to their relationships with peers than their relationships with adults, such as their relationships with teachers. Limited references were made to family. However, Maxwell (2006) and Maxwell (2015) asked participants to make pictures of and talk about school. This may have focused the participants to only think of people within the school context, even if their relationships with family members outside of school were

of importance. The current research expands on these previous findings and points to an appreciation of other sources of social importance for pupils beyond the school context.

Repertory grid technique as a meaningful method for Voice of the Child

The findings replicated and extended those of Maxwell (2006) and Maxwell (2015) and provide some emerging evidence that the repertory grid interview method can be viewed as an alternative method to PCP drawing techniques for VoC. As such, the research has shown that the repertory grid interview method offers a potential method for meaningful engagement with VoC. Unlike other methods it avoids over simplistic strategies such as 'I like' questions, the use of which potentially limits a child's understanding of the purpose of the process (Todd, 2003).

Instead, the findings demonstrated precise data gathered as close to the child's perspective as possible. It can be argued that the repertory grid interview method resulted in constructs that were more refined than other methods and as such could be applied more intuitively by school staff. From a practical perspective, this would enable busy teachers to gain an insightful overview of pupil perceptions in a time efficient way. There is also creative scope here to move away from a ladder model as postulated by Hart (2008) to explore the VoC within the context of child led spaces not typically considered when other methods are used.

The repertory grid interview method can elicit a nuanced understanding of the following information:

- It offers a way for children to conceptualise and express their sense of self as formed by their constructs.
- It gives insight into whether an individual has a positive sense of self by exploring whether they perceive themselves as closer to their ideal or non-ideal self.

- It provides a means for creating a conceptual map of a child's or group of children's models of their social world, by exploring who they see themselves as similar and close to.
- It supports insight into how children construct, perceive and therefore understand their social interactions with others via examination of their personal constructs.

Limitations and future research

It is important to acknowledge that little variation in constructs and related perceptions were found across participants. Whilst this could simply indicate similarity of views, it could equally be a limitation of the repertory grid interview method to identify nuance in its representation of VoC. The data analysis method of content analysis could also have influenced this outcome as it involves reviewing individual's constructs and assigning them to common, and more general, categories. Through this process, a general picture emerges but at the sacrifice of distinction between participants views and accompanying detail. As such, practitioners may wish to consider the purpose of VoC methods in relation to seeking an overview of a group or wishing to seek individual detail.

The eight participants who were recruited for the repertory grid interviews were done so via an opportunistic sampling method. Eight parents gave consent resulting in the final sample. It can be argued that this may have led to a nonrepresentative sample, where the type of parent who responded to the request was potentially more prosocial and likely to respond positively to requests from the school. This may then have been reflected in the pupil participants. As such, the constructs of the children potentially represent a skewed sample and were not representative of the whole class. A stratified sampling method would have been an alternative sampling method which would have sufficiently represented the class.

As a result of this sampling method a small sample size of participants were involved in this study. However, the research was interested in depth rather than quantity of data; this study could be positioned as a pilot with future research seeking a larger sample of pupils.

The repertory grid interviews were conducted by the researcher who is a trained educational psychologist. As such, they possessed pre-existing knowledge of PCP and the repertory grid interview method. However, the research is more widely interested in promoting use of PCP and repertory grid interview method in schools by other professionals for VoC, such as teachers and teaching assistants. Such professionals may not have the pre-requisite knowledge of the theory and repertory grid method and would require training by a psychologist. Future research could explore training teachers in the method and analysis of data to explore if similar findings are arrived at.

The research directed participants to explore their social relationships as it sought to extend the work of Maxwell (2006) and Maxwell (2015). However, future research could look at a range of issues pertinent to the VoC. Further still, heeding Hart's (2008) argument for the need to represent the wide range of culturally diverse spaces within which children exist, future research utilising PCP methods could explore VoC interviews that do not have an adult indicated topic. Instead the child is guided to speak about whatever is relevant to them by choosing their own topic for the repertory grid interview method.

Conclusion

The PCP repertory grid interview method was able to offer sympathetic insight into the perspective of participants by generating their 'model of the world' with regards to social relationships. As specific constructs were elicited, a preciseness was apparent in the data that

may be missed by other PCP and VoC methods. As such, the repertory grid interview method can be positioned as a method that would promote meaningful rather than tokenistic pre exploration of VoC. It is recommendable to practitioners and researchers wishing to develop educational practice that seeks to understand and respond to the perceptions, concerns and views of children and young people regarding their social relationships but is also applicable to a wide range of topics.

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Appendix One:

Moral	**Emotional**	**Rational**	**Personal**	**Intellectual / Operational**	**Values / Interests**
Good – bad	Visceral – rational	Extroverted – introverted	Stable – weak	Capable – incapable	Ideological, political,

					religious, social, moral and gender values
Altruist – egoist	Warm – cold	Pleasant – unpleasant	Active – passive	Intelligent – dull	Values and specific interests
Humble – proud	Optimist – pessimist	Direct – devious	Hard working – lazy	Cultured - uncultured	
Respectful – judgmental	Balanced – unbalanced	Tolerant – authoritarian	Organised – disorganised	Focused – unfocused	
Faithful – unfaithful	Specific emotions	Conformist – rebel	Decisive – indecisive	Creative – not creative	
Sincere – insencere	sexuality	Dependent – independent	Flexible – rigid	Specific abilities	
Just – unjust		Peacable - aggressive	Thoughtful - shallow		
Responsible – irresponsible		Sympathetic – unsympathetic	Mature - immature		

		Trusting – suspicious	Self-acceptance – self-criticism		

Appendix Two: Example Rep Grid

CONSTRUCTS		**ELEMENTS**				
Non preferred pole	**Preferred pole**	**How I am now**	**How I was**	**How I would like to be**	**How I wouldn't like to be**	**Best friend**
Sad	Happy					
Unfriendly	Friendly					
Lazy	Energetic					
Unpopular	Popular					

Rating Likert Scale Example:

Sad 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Happy