RESEARCH ARTICLE

Teachers and school-aged learners: do they inhabit the same classroom world?

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Abstract

This paper reports on research undertaken in secondary schools in Brunei to investigate how teachers and learners (aged approximately 14) view the English language learning classroom. The paper reviews the literature on learner perceptions, and comparisons with those of teachers, and argues that a 'researcher's agenda' frequently imposes limitations on data gathered as the researcher's priorities, rather than the respondents' priorities, may dictate the focus and the questions that are asked. The paper documents how a research design utilising personal construct repertory grids was therefore developed to allow respondents to 'speak for themselves'. Respondents were asked to build repertory grids in respect of nine common task-types from their classroom, in order to establish the constructs they draw on when thinking about their language lessons. Findings show that the respondent teachers and the respondent learners have very different views on what they hope for in classroom work, with evidence that learners view the classroom as a 'social event' (in which to socialise) in direct contrast to the teachers, who appear to view the classroom as 'a pedagogic event' (in which to teach). The significance of this is that the learners are unlikely to be oriented towards achievement in language learning, and that the teachers will therefore find it difficult to keep learners focussed on the learning objectives. The paper concludes that it is only by involving learners in establishing aims and objectives, and in determining ways of working, that teachers and learners can be brought to 'inhabit the same classroom world'. (Words = 250)

Keywords: language teaching; learner perceptions; teacher perceptions; personal construct theory; repertory grids

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1 Introduction

The research reported in this paper is motivated by a simple, overarching aim: to assist in understanding the factors which may lead to varying levels of engagement and success in the language classroom, particularly with learners in secondary school contexts (i.e., learners aged 10-16). The specific context for the research is Brunei, a country in SE Asia, but we would hope that the findings, and, in particular, the methodology employed will have relevance in a wide range of contexts and in other sectors of education.

Viewed as an initial step to better understand success and engagement, the paper investigates how learners and teachers perceive the classroom, on the assumption that any significant difference in perceptions may have an impact on how far learners engage with what teachers provide in the classroom. That is, the paper attempts to discover the extent to which teachers and learners may or may not metaphorically 'inhabit the same classroom world', as the title asks. The intention, then, is to investigate how far they share similar perspectives on the purposes and nature of the classroom activities they do together, with the assumption that, if their views do not align in some way, then the teacher's intention to help bring about language learning, particularly in respect of any official school syllabus, is unlikely to be achieved. Conversely, of course, if learners have relevant learning goals which are not shared or perceived by the teacher, it is quite likely that the teacher's classroom work will not facilitate the achievement of those goals.

Given this recognition of the importance of investigating the way teachers and learners see the classroom, the research reported here aims to address three basic questions in

respect of the secondary school context:

(1)   How do teachers and learners personally view the purposes and nature of the classroom activities they do together?

(2)   How far might it be possible to understand success and failure in achieving the official purposes of the classroom by reference to these views?

(3)   What implications may these findings have for the way teaching and learning is organised?

2 Investigating teacher and learner perceptions

In recent years, the investigation of teacher and learner perceptions of the language classroom, as distinct from language learning/teaching in general, has received increased levels of attention. Much of this research has focussed principally on understanding the teachers' viewpoint, with relatively less attention to the learners' perspective in the classroom. Predominantly, research projects have tended to focus on one party in the teaching-learning relationship, rather than a comparative account of how both parties view the same, shared experience.

In relation to the teachers' perspective, and under the broad label of 'teacher cognition', research has examined a range of aspects relating to what teachers may think, know, or believe about language teaching, and their attitudes, emotions and identities as part of the "unobservable dimension of teaching" (Borg 2012:11). A central concern in this area of research has been on teacher decision-making in the classroom and how that decision-making may be affected by these "unobservable" factors, as they are reflected in the "language-teaching mind" of the teacher (Burns, Freeman and Edwards 2015). The underlying idea here is a recognition that language teachers *think and do*, rather than simply *do* (Freeman 1996), and that this thinking and doing is always contextually

and dynamically based in their own classrooms and on their own prior experiences in learning, in teaching, in their training and interactions with colleagues, as well as reading, conferences, and the influence of significant others in their personal and professional lives (Barnard and Burns 2012: 2). Numerous studies have examined the relationship that may exist between this "language-teaching mind" and teacher action in the classroom, beginning with Johnson's (1992) and Woods' (1996) pioneering explorations, and embracing the perspectives of both experienced and novice teachers (Numrich 1996) to understand how an individual teacher might make particular decisions in the classroom. More recent work has moved beyond an "individualist", focus on teacher decision-making with its static construction of the factors influencing this (Burns, Freeman and Edwards 2015) to situate teacher action within a larger, dynamically, complex system in the classroom, where teacher decisions may respond to not only their own personal and professional biography, but also their view of self past and future, their ongoing, dynamic and changing interactions with learners, the unpredictable nature of the classroom, and the wider social and political context (Kiss 2012).

Turning to the learner's perspective, there is a substantial body of literature, beginning in mid 1970s with the good language learner studies (Rubin 1975), through to more recent times (O' Malley and Chamot 1990; Cane 2008; Grainger 2012; Rao 2016; Oxford 2017), investigating learners' approaches to language learning, utilising the concept of 'learner strategies' to describe how they see language and how they help themselves learn, particularly outside the classroom. In addition, a number of research studies have attempted to examine a range of aspects, such as learners' beliefs about language learning (Kalaja and Barcelos 2003), their self-concept and identity as language learners (Mercer 2011), and different classroom activities, such as meaning-

based classroom practice (Savignon and Wang 2003), and general classroom pedagogy (Barkhuizen 1998; Rao 2002; Alizadeh 2018; Fan 2019).   Generally, however, research into learner perspectives has been principally focussed on investigating adult learners' views, most frequently in university language centres, where data collection is often easier to obtain. There are, however, some notable exceptions, where researchers have investigated views of younger respondents. Shak and Gardner (2008), for example, investigate primary school children's reaction to 'focus on form' tasks in terms of four criteria (enjoyment, ease, performance and motivation) while Shrestha (2013) reports on a large scale survey involving 600 grade 3 Bangladeshi primary school children to discover their perceptions of and attitudes towards classroom activities in a technology-enhanced curriculum innovation project. Littlejohn (2008) reports on upper secondary school learners' (14-15 year olds) perceptions of tasks designed to stimulate metacognitive strategies, and finds that they emphasised 'surface compliance' with the teacher's demands rather than actual engagement in metacognitive reflection. A related finding is described by Boye, Gardiner and Littlejohn (2021) who present research on younger secondary school learners' (aged 13-14) perceptions of the language classroom. They show that the respondent learners appear to mainly think about the classroom in relation to enjoyment rather than learning opportunities.

While research into teacher and learners perspectives has certainly enriched our understanding of language learning, there is, however, relatively little research which documents comparative data of teachers' and learners' views of the same classroom, which is the focus of the present project. The need for this kind of research was most clearly articulated by Allwright, who as early as 1984, posed a blunt question in a paper entitled *Why don't learners learn what teachers teach?* Allwright reported on some small-scale work he had done in asking learners what the lesson they had just taken part

in had been about. Strikingly, he found that about half the class was unable to tell him, 'correctly', what the focus of the lesson had been. That is, they failed to identify the teacher's main teaching point, in spite of the fact that it was explicitly labelled in the textbook which each learner had in front of them. Allwright's conclusion was, therefore, that the same classroom lesson can in fact be "about different things for different learners" (1984:3) and that these "different things" can be very distant from the intended purposes of the teacher.

In the years following Allwright's early paper, a number of writers encouraged investigation into a possible gap between teachers' and learners' perceptions of their lessons. Important contributions in this regard have come from Breen (1987), Prabhu (1992) and, most tellingly, from Nunan (1995) who, in a discussion of data from an earlier study, found "stark contrasts and dramatic mismatches" between teachers' and learners' perspectives. As noted earlier, however, most subsequent empirical research, has concentrated on classrooms with adult learners (see, for example, Alizadeh 2018; Barkhuizen 1998; Block 1996; Kumaravadivelu 2006; Stewart 2007; Tavakoli 2009), and noticeably less has been done to undertake a comparative investigation of the perspectives of teachers and their school-aged learners, whether in primary schools (aged 5-12) or secondary schools (aged 10-16). Some exceptions to this are Hawkey (2006), who found significant differences in the perceptions students and teachers in primary and secondary schools in Italy held about the frequency of different types of classroom tasks, and Ilin, Inozu and Yumru (2007), who examined primary school teachers' and children's understandings of a task-based methodology, and found that while teachers perceived task-based work as a learning opportunity, learners perceived it as a game, and thus tended to slip into mother tongue use. Consistently, studies such as those cited show that school-aged learners can have highly developed views about

what happens in their language classroom, and that, very often, these may be at considerable variance to those of their teachers.

3 Research methodology

A recurrent issue in many of the research projects on teachers' and learners' perspectives is that they are most usually based on an expert perception of *what matters*, most frequently selecting criteria for data collection based on what the researchers believe is significant, leading to questionnaire and interview designs which may prioritise researchers', not respondents', concerns, and which may result in quite narrow data, limited to the researchers' specific focus (Gardiner, Littlejohn and Boye 2021, 2). The danger in this is that the true nature of respondents' priorities may be masked by a researcher's agenda, leading to findings which may have little underlying relevance to classroom realities. This problem may be even more pronounced in research into school-aged learners as school learners are likely to have quite different priorities in classroom life to any adult, expert researcher, as the school occupies a much greater proportion of, and significance in, their daily lives than it will do for any adult learner. Given this, a starting point for this research project was to identify a data collection procedure which allows the children, and as we were seeking parallel data, teachers also, to 'speak for themselves', without a predetermined set of questions which topicalise specific areas for discussion. To achieve this purpose, we chose to draw on the use of personal construct repertory grids, as a way of revealing the learners' and teachers' own vocabulary to describe their classroom, which we could then explore further.

As a research tool, personal construct repertory grids are based on a branch of phenomenology known as Personal Construct Theory (first conceived of by Kelly

[1955] for therapeutic purposes, but see Winter and Reed [2016] and Caputi, Viney, Walker and Crittenden [2011] for more recent discussion and application). Personal Construct Theory sees people as having their own 'constructions' of the world, that is, how they believe it operates and the typifications of aspects ('elements') of their environment which they may have - people, places, events, and so on. Such typifications, the theory suggests, are extremely powerful and will directly affect how people interact with their world, based on expectations from experience. To reveal these constructions, Kelly developed the repertory grid technique, now widely-used in many fields including educational research and practice, management and business, clinical therapy, and other areas in social science (see, for example, Cohen, Manion and Morrison [2018]; Johnson and Nádas [2012]; Fransella, Bannister, and Bell [2003]; Tursch [2016]; Lemke, Clark, and Wilson [2011]; Winter [2013]).

In essence, the technique uses a face-to-face session to elicit respondents' personal constructs of a particular context or experience by asking them to group named 'elements' of that context according to similarity/difference and then to explain the reasons for their grouping. Elements must be objectively discernible components of the context under investigation, which have a social significance. For example, in a work context, elements may be different people or different work roles, or different work tasks. In the first part of the session, the respondent is asked to select any three elements (usually named on cards laid out on a table) and then to put those elements into two groups, in such a way that they feel the grouping reflects a contrast for them. The respondent's own description of their reason for this contrast is then entered on a grid as a dichotomous 'construct', and becomes the respondent's first 'construct pair'. An example from a workplace context in which a respondent is asked to group three workplace colleagues might result, for instance, in the respondent's construct pair as

"friendly – serious" or "helpful – reserved". Note that construct pairs need not, and mostly do not, reflect conventional opposites, but record how the respondent sees the contrast between the elements chosen. The procedure of selecting three elements and forming two groups with them is then repeated with different combinations of elements until a set of constructs is built up (typically, eight or more). In the final stage, in which a complete grid is realised, all elements are rated against all constructs to determine the extent to which constructs overlap and so which ones characterise the ways in which the respondent appears to view the context under investigation.

Respondents and procedure

The data presented here derives from a sample of Year 8 secondary school learners (aged approx 14) and teachers of English in Brunei. Brunei's educational system is described as bilingual since students officially receive most of their school subjects in English from primary school (Years 1-6) with only a few subjects officially taught in Malay. Language switching is, however, common as students' abilities in English vary considerably. All students receive regular English language classes throughout their schooling to Year 13, consisting of 3-4 fifty-minute lessons a week, with an emphasis, in Year 8, on reading short comprehension passages and writing short narrative or descriptive texts. Focussed listening work and oral presentation are comparatively infrequent. Classes usually contain 20-25 students and are streamed into ability levels, with 6-8 classes in each year group.

Two schools were involved in data collection, selected on the recommendation of the university faculty of education as typical schools in the capital area. Year 8 was recommended by the relevant school principals as 'more settled' since, at the time of data collection, Year 7 was 'settling in' from primary school and Year 9 was engaged in

exam preparation. Selection criteria for the learners were that they should have Malay as their first language (constituting the majority of learners in Brunei, amongst a population that includes speakers of Chinese and other indigenous and non-indigenous first languages). Beyond that, learners were chosen randomly from the middle ability range (as identified by their teachers). A total of 16 learners and five teachers from the two schools were asked to complete a repertory grid with the elements from Table 1, as explained in the next section.

The sessions with the learners were conducted in pairs, to enable them to feel more at ease and to dispel the notion that this was an individual testing session. To ensure that language abilities in English did not limit the expression of their views, sessions were carried out in Malay or English, depending on which language they felt most comfortable in, beginning with Malay to establish that that was fully acceptable. Sessions with the teachers were conducted individually and entirely in English, given their high level of competence in the language. Table 1 summarises demographic data about the respondents.

Table 1 Summary of demographic details of respondents

Learners	Teachers
16 learners, 3 males and 13 females	5 teachers, all female
Secondary school, middle ability range	Secondary school teaching experience of 5+ years
Year 8, aged approx. 14 years	
First language: Malay	Bachelors degree and/or teaching certificate

Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the Universiti Brunei Darussalam Research Ethics Committee and the Brunei Ministry of Education, and agreement was obtained from each school to collect data. Full consent for the use of anonymous data

was also obtained from all participating teachers, learners and parents or guardians.

Elements for the grid

To enable the use of the repertory grid technique to investigate teacher and learner perspectives on the classroom, the first requirement was to identify a common, social basis for selecting elements of the classroom which all participants shared. Any language classroom will be characterised by the actions that teachers and learners take together – that is, by the tasks they utilise (here defined in the widest possible sense to include any classroom activities or exercises for the purposes of language learning [Littlejohn 2011; 2022]). Given the role that classroom tasks may have in structuring or framing the way in which teachers and learners interact with each other, and the manner in which tasks define responsibilities, rights and who can say what to whom (Littlejohn 2011; Wallace 2006), we felt that using tasks as elements would provide a grounded, neutral basis for capturing the essence of the classroom in which teachers and learners participate. Based on extensive classroom observations undertaken by one of the research team members in their capacity as a teacher-supervisor, further observations by other team members, and final confirmation by the teachers involved, nine distinct, common forms of activity found in the selected classrooms were identified as elements for grid construction, as shown in Table 2. Most task types listed will be self-explanatory from their label; 'brainstorming ideas in a group' refers to an initial stage in a writing task, usually completing a mind map, while 'discussing in groups' is a stage of collecting opinions to share verbally with the class. Teachers routinely use these labels in class, so learners are familiar with them. Taken together, the identified task types constitute the bulk of the work in the selected classrooms. (Note that familiar task types such as listening comprehension, role play, scripted pairwork and so on, are absent because these are rarely used in the selected classrooms.)

Table 2 Elements used for the construction of the repertory grids: nine task types

Brainstorming ideas in a group	Discussing in groups
Filling in the gaps in a text	Grammar practice exercises
Listening to the teacher's explanation	Doing guided writing
Doing reading comprehension exercises	Doing creative writing
Correcting each others work	

4 Data

Each session took about an hour to complete, following the procedure described earlier to produce a complete repertory grid. After confirming their understanding of the task type labels, respondents (learners in pairs or an individual teacher) randomly selected the named task types as elements for comparison to build up their set of constructs on a grid, with the researcher asking questions to stimulate engagement. Once a set of construct pairs (typically 8 or more) had been built up on the grid, respondents were asked to individually rate each task type, by drawing an arrow to show how they viewed the task type in relation to each construct pair – that is, whether the task type lay more towards one pole of the construct pair or the other pole. Each session therefore resulted in a separate completed grid for each respondent.

Learner data

In total, the 16 learners produced 66 constructs to reflect their view of characteristics of the selected task types, and made a total of 1188 construct selections to indicate the nature of those task types as they saw them. Figure 1 shows a sample grid, with eight construct pairs, produced in this way. As can be seen, the grid shows a mix of English and Malay, as the learners chose to express their ideas. Where Malay was used, translations were agreed between the learners and the researcher, after

clarification of precisely what they intended. The agreed translations are shown in the key. The sample grid also shows how the contrasting end points of each construct pair do not necessarily conform to familiar opposites, but rather reflect the way these particular learners saw contrasts in the selected tasks. In the sample, for example, we have some interesting juxtapositions, such as those in construct pairs 6 and 7, in which an emotionally comfortable response (*chill)* is contrasted with a lack of interest (*boring)* and in which an emotionally positive response (*happy)* is contrasted with a state of physical or mental drain (*exhausting).*

Figure 1 A sample learner repertory grid

		Brainstorm-ing ideas in a group	Filling in the gaps in a text	Listening to the teacher's explan-ation	Doing reading compre-hension exercises	Correct-ing each others work	Discuss-ing in groups	Grammar practice exercises	Doing guided writing	Doing creative writing	
1	KEFAHAMAN SENDIRI	←	→	↗	→	↗	←		↗	→	↗	CIKGU EXPLAIN
2	PAYAH	↙	←	→	←	→	←	→	←	→	SENANG
3	INDA BERAPA DETAILED	←	↗	→	↗	→	←	↗	↗	↗	MORE DETAILED
4	GROUPING	↙	↗	↗	↗	→	←	↗	↗	↗	INDIVIDUAL
5	BOLEH BERCERITA	←	↗	↗	↗	←	←	↗	↗	←	LESS SPEAKING with friends
6	CHILL	←	↗	↗	↗	←	←	↗	↗	↗	BORING
7	HAPPY	←	↗	←	↗	↗	←	↗	↗	↗	NGALIH
8	BEREDAR 2 (berehat)	←	↗	↗	↗	↗	←	↗	↗	↗	SERENTAK (INDA PT REHAT)

Key: 1 students work it out for themselves – teacher explains; 2 difficult – easy; 3 less detailed – more detailed; 4 grouping – individual; 5 more interaction with friends – less speaking with friends; 6 chill – boring; 7 happy – exhausting; 8 take turns to do the work – doing the work individually

Teacher data

Using the same procedure and elements, the five teachers generated 37 construct pairs to reflect their description of the task characteristics. They made a total of 347 construct

selections to indicate the nature of the task types as they saw them (more than expected as one teacher saw some elements as potentially reflecting both ends of their construct pair). Figure 2 presents a sample teacher's repertory grid.

Figure 2 A sample teacher repertory grid

	Left construct	Brainstorm-ing ideas in a group	Filling in the gaps in a text	Listening to the teacher's explan-ation	Doing reading compre-hension exercises	Correct-ing each others work	Discuss-ing in groups	Grammar practice exercises	Doing guided writing	Doing creative writing	Right construct
1	students can go off task	←	→	↔	⇢	→	←	→	←	←	students stay on task
2	Thrilling for students	↔	→	←	←	←	←	→	→	←	less thrilling for students
3	hard work for teacher	←	→	←	→	→	→	→	←	←	less hard work for teacher
4	uneven participation is possible	←	→	←	→	→	←	→	→	←	even participation
5	working with what students already know	→	←	→	→	←	→	←	←	→	expanding on higher level thinking
6	more room for exploitation	←	→	←	←	→	←	→	→	←	more limited scope
7	less teacher for to do	←	←	→	←	←	←	←	→	→	more for teacher to do
8	teacher is involved	→	→	←	←	←	←	→	←	←	teacher not involved

Key: 1 students can go off task – students stay on task; 2 thrilling for the students– less thrilling for the students; 3 hard work for the teacher – less hard work for the teacher; 4 uneven participation is possible– even participation; 5 working with what students already know– expanding on higher level thinking; 6 more room for exploitation– more limited scope; 7 less for teacher to do – more for teacher to do; 8 teacher is involved – teacher not involved

In the case of the teachers' grids, and as shown in the sample, construct pairs tend to follow anticipated contrasts more than they do in the learners' grids. However, the strength of the repertory grid as a technique for revealing personal perceptions is clearly demonstrated by the fact that construct pairs are often being used in ways which are not entirely predictable. In the sample, for example, *doing guided writing* and *doing creative writing* are both seen as suffering from the same problems in that *1 students can go off task*, and they both involve *3 hard work for the teacher,* even though intuitively one would expect that guided writing should suggest more direction for the

student and less hard work for the teacher, in much the same way as the elements "doing reading comprehension" work or "filling in the gaps".

5 Data analysis and findings

With data derived directly from the respondents in their own words, our specific interest in investigating teachers' and learners' perceptions was to see how far the respondents shared a similar view of the classroom, as evidenced by their description of the tasks they work with. To identify any dominant patterns or features in the data, the constructs elicited from the learners and the teachers were analysed in three separate phases. These were (1) coding of the constructs into groups and determining incidence of selection; (2) categorisation of resulting codes into 'macrocodes' and determining the dominant areas of respondents' concerns, and (3) 'mapping' of the constructs to see how far constructs may overlap or implicate presence of other constructs. For each phase, once a code was identified, coding, macrocoding and mapping was done independently by each member of the research team and cross-checked to ensure coding consistency and interrater reliability.

Analysis of learner data

Codes for the 66 constructs produced by the learners were defined based on the wording used in the learners' grids in order to preserve the learners' own language as far as possible. For example, a code of 'enjoyable' was used to bring together constructs which were related to that reaction, such as *happy, chill, exciting, good vibe, get into mood, enjoy* and others. The total number of times a construct was selected by an arrow pointing towards it was then calculated, and from that, the total number of relevant selections for each code. Table 3 lists the 30 discrete codes which emerged

from the 66 constructs produced by the learners, rank-ordered in terms of incidence of selection.

Table 3 shows that, for the learners, the code 'enjoyable' predominates, followed by codes relating to whether learners are to work alone or in groups. Most of the codes at this stage are self-explanatory and, as noted, mainly use construct labels produced by the learners themselves. A few codes need clarification: *not focussed* and *focussed* refer to whether, in the learner's view, they are required to concentrate or not; *narrow* and *wide* refer to their view of the breadth of task topic; *receiving* indicates when the learners see themselves as just attending to a teacher explanation; *unsure* refers to their feeling of a lack of certainty that they are doing what they are expected to do; *obligation* refers to a feeling that they must do something.

Table 3 Learner grids - codes and incidence of construct selection

Code	Selections
enjoyable	156
individual	130
interactive	110
boring	102
easy	91
tiring	88
difficult	62
thinking	59
not focussed	55
stress	38
focussed	35
narrow	30
with energy	28
less boring	26
supported	24
receiving	23
wide	15
relaxed	11
satisfied	15
worth it	15
memorising	14
clear	14
not demanding	11
obligation	9
unsure	7

not enjoyable	5
confused	5
unclear	4
unsatisfied	3
not valuable	3
Total selections	1188

While it is instructive to look at the rank ordering of the codes, a more interesting picture of what is happening can be obtained by grouping the codes into macrocodes, to see how the codes and the constructs that they include cluster together. Table 4 shows such a grouping and demonstrates that, affect, either negative or positive, appears to account for 43.3% of the construct selections, with grouping (individual or interactive) accounting for a further 20.2%, indicating the learners' overall predominant concern with how enjoyable or not a particular task is, and how they will be working. Taken together, affect and grouping account for over 63.5% of the construct selections made by the learners, indicating that these two aspects are the most significant for them when thinking about their classroom activity. Strikingly, there is much less concern for how challenging a task is and virtually no regard at all for whether a task contains any value for them, and if it relates to any learning goals.
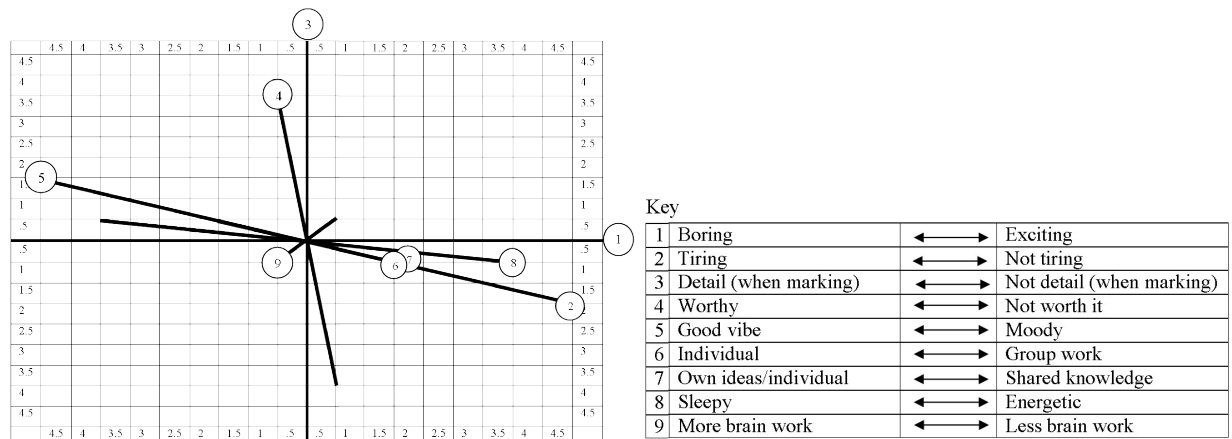
Table 4 Learner grids: Macrocodes and incidence of construct selection

Macrocodes and related codes	Selections	Percentage
Affectively negative (boring, tiring, stress, less boring, unsure, not enjoyable, confused, unsatisfied)	274	23.6
Affectively positive (enjoyable, with energy, supported, relaxed, satisfied)	234	19.7
Individual/alone (individual)	130	10.9
Interactive/social: (interactive)	110	9.3
Cognitively easy (easy, not demanding)	102	8.6
Focus: (focussed, narrow, wide, clear, unclear)	98	8.3
Cognitive process (thinking, memorising)	73	6.1
Cognitively difficult (difficult)	62	5.2
Distracted (not focussed)	55	4.6
Receiving (receiving)	23	1.9
Value positive (worth it)	15	1.3

Obligation (obligation)	9	0.8
Value negative (not valuable)	3	0.3
Total selections	1188	

Returning to the constructs themselves, in addition to coding and macrocoding, a further step in grid analysis is to identify how far constructs co-occur (that is, if *construct X* is present for an element, how likely it is that *construct Y* will also be present). To do this, constructs from each respondent can be plotted on charts to map out a metaphorical 'psychological space' (McCloughlin and Matthews 2009; Shaw and Gaines 1992), showing the proximity of one construct to another. To achieve this, each construct is successively compared with every other construct to see how many times they have both been selected for the same element. The constructs with the highest and lowest number of matches then form x and y axes for the chart. All of the other constructs can then be plotted on a chart by taking the number of matches each has with the constructs used for the x and y axes as the coordinates. To eliminate chance as a factor in the match between construct selections, 50% of the number of elements is subtracted from each set of coordinates. In the case of this particular application of chart plotting, there were a total of 9 elements, so 4.5 was subtracted, resulting in coordinates that may be negative, positive or zero. (See Cohen, Manion, and Morrison [2018] for a fuller explanation of the procedure involved in making construct charts). Figure 3 shows a sample chart derived from one learner's grid, and the key to plotted constructs.

Figure 3 A sample mapping of a learner's repertory grid with constructs

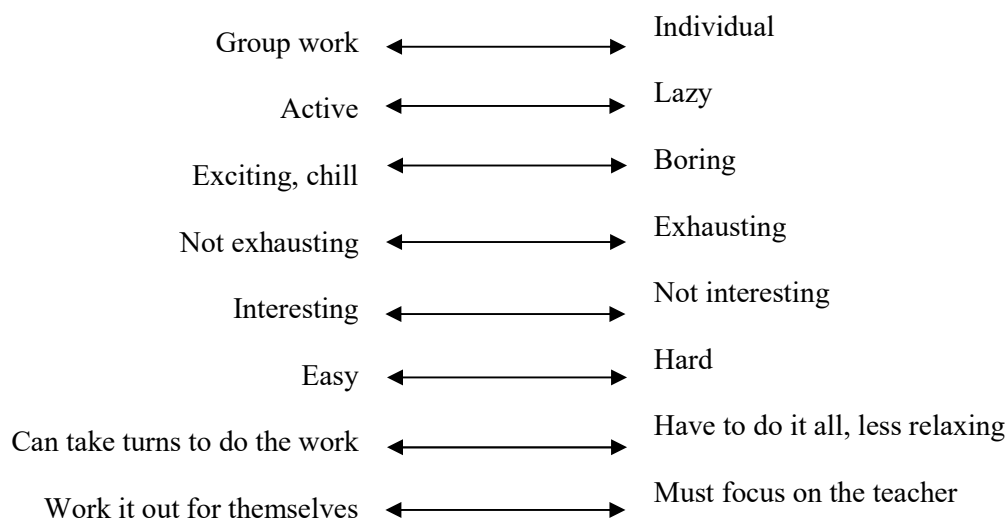| Key			
1	Boring	←——→	Exciting
2	Tiring	←——→	Not tiring
3	Detail (when marking)	←——→	Not detail (when marking)
4	Worthy	←——→	Not worth it
5	Good vibe	←——→	Moody
6	Individual	←——→	Group work
7	Own ideas/individual	←——→	Shared knowledge
8	Sleepy	←——→	Energetic
9	More brain work	←——→	Less brain work

Mapping constructs in this way enables a visualisation of how the presence of one construct may imply the presence of another construct, in that we can see how far constructs lie in the same or a close plane (note that line length is not significant here, as it is the trajectory of the line which is important and what other construct pairs are on the same or close trajectory). In the chart in Figure 3, for example, it appears that construct pair *6 individual - group work* co-occurs with construct pair *7 own ideas - shared knowledge,* which is of course hardly surprising. More interestingly, we can see that these constructs also co-occur (along the same plane) with construct pair *2 tiring - not tiring* and that all three of them lie in direct contrast with construct pair *5 good vibe – moody.* The implication from this, for this particular learner, is that it seems likely that the prospect of working individually will be accompanied by a tendency towards feelings of tiredness and a *moody* disposition, whilst the prospect of working with others in groups will signal a *good vibe* and less tiredness.

Data from all 16 learners were mapped in the same way, to give an overall impression of how their constructs contrasted and occurred along the same plane, taking note in particular of how similar constructs appeared across all the learners' grids. Table 5 summarises indicative contrasts that appeared from this, where these occurred in at least 4 of the 8 grids. It is important to remember that these are not discrete either/or

contrasts, but tendencies, indicating 'more towards' one end of the construct cline or the other. Nevertheless, the table indicates the way in which the mapping shows constructs clustering together.

Table 5 Clustering of learner constructs occurring on the same or a close plane.

Group work ⟷	Individual
Active ⟷	Lazy
Exciting, chill ⟷	Boring
Not exhausting ⟷	Exhausting
Interesting ⟷	Not interesting
Easy ⟷	Hard
Can take turns to do the work ⟷	Have to do it all, less relaxing
Work it out for themselves ⟷	Must focus on the teacher

We can see in Table 5 once again the presence of affect as a dominant basis for their construction (view) of the elements (tasks), and the important linking with ways of working in groups or individually. In very general terms, and particularly as this is a synthesis of data from all 16 learners, it suggests that individual work and a required focus on the teacher co-occurs with feelings towards laziness, boredom, tiredness and work being 'hard'. In contrast, working with their peers, having opportunities to work things out for themselves and sharing the work co-occur with feelings towards excitement, interest, activity and work being 'easy'. As noted earlier, what is most striking about this, however, is the absence of any constructs which indicate learning value, benefit in learning, or alignment with any learning goals. The main criteria against which these learners appear to be judging classroom tasks is the extent to which they promote social engagement and with it, for them, an enjoyable experience.

Analysis of teacher data

As noted earlier, the five teachers produced a total of 37 construct pairs with 347 construct selections. After coding, the total number of times each code was selected in the teacher grids was then calculated. Table 6 shows the results from this first stage of analysis.

Table 6 Teacher grids - codes and incidence of construct selection

Code	Selections
controlled	33
individual	33
teacher work load less	31
interactive	25
grammar	22
free	21
teacher-centred	19
student-centred	18
teacher work load high	16
learner safe	14
enjoyable for learner	11
participation required	9
teacher safe	9
not enjoyable for learner	7
easy	7
learner relaxed	7
teacher relaxed	7
managed learning	6
comprehension	6
demanding of learner	5
student focussed	5
participation even	5
managed learning	5
not demanding of learner	4
student not focussed	4
learner not safe	4
participation unsure	4
testing	4
difficult	2
learner less relaxed	2
teacher less relaxed	2
teacher less safe	0
Total selections	347

Once again, most of the codes are self-explanatory in nature, and all derive from

construct labels which the teachers supplied. 'Controlled' refers to constructs such as *rigid, planned, scripted, fixed answer* and *more limited scope*. 'Free' refers to constructs such as *free and easy, students' creativity, unscripted, not fixed answer* and *they have to think 'outside the box'*. 'Managed learning' refers to constructs such as *scaffolding activity* and *gets them familiar with* the teaching point.

In the next stage, and in the same manner as implemented with the learner data, macrocodes were then defined to see how the codes, and the constructs they referred to, grouped together. These are presented in Table 7. Here we see a dominance of aspects which directly concern the actions of the teacher (*teacher workload, control, teaching objective, teacher-centred, teacher security* and *testing*) which amount to around 46% of constructs selected, and the action of the learners (*learner security, free, participation, student-centred, cognitively easy, focus,* and *cognitively difficult)* which amount to a further 32%. Interestingly here, and in direct contrast with the learners' data, the incidence of constructs which relate to social grouping is lower at 16.7% (*individual, interactive*) and much lower indeed in relation to affective issues (*affectively negative, affectively positive*) at only 5.2%. The largest single aspect is a concern with *teacher workload* at 13.5% of constructs selected¸ with *individual¸ control* and *teaching objective* following with 9.5% each.
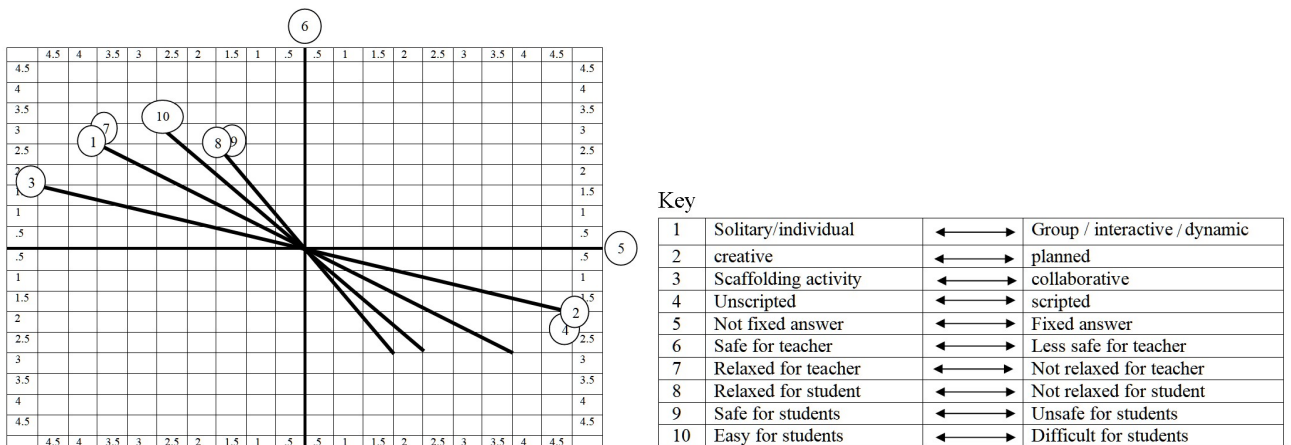
Table 7 Teacher grids: Macrocodes and incidence of construct selection

Categories and codes	Selections	Percentage
Teacher workload (teacher workload high, teacher workload less)	47	13.5
Control (controlled)	33	9.5
Teaching objective (comprehension, grammar)	33	9.5
Individual (individual, alone)	33	9.5
Learner security (learner safe, learner not safe, learner relaxed, learner less relaxed)	27	7.8
Interactive (interactive)	25	7.2
Teacher-centred (teacher-centred)	25	7.2

Free (free)	21	6.1
Teacher security (teacher safe, teacher not safe, teacher relaxed, teacher less relaxed)	18	5.2
Participation (participation not sure, participation required, participation even)	18	5.2
Student-centred (student-centred)	18	5.2
Affectively Positive (enjoyable for the learner)	11	3.2
Cognitively easy (easy, not demanding of the learner)	11	3.2
Focus (students focussed, students not focussed)	9	2.6
Affectively Negative (not enjoyable for the learner)	7	2.0
Cognitively difficult (difficult, demanding of learners)	7	2.0
Testing (testing)	4	1.2
Total selections	347	

In common with the procedure adopted for the learner grids, matches in the selection of constructs were calculated for each of the five teacher grids, to present a metaphorical mapping of 'psychological space'. Figure 4 presents one such chart, with the related constructs.

Figure 4 A sample mapping of a teacher's repertory grid with constructs

Key				
1	Solitary/individual	← →	Group / interactive / dynamic
2	creative	← →	planned
3	Scaffolding activity	← →	collaborative
4	Unscripted	← →	scripted
5	Not fixed answer	← →	Fixed answer
6	Safe for teacher	← →	Less safe for teacher
7	Relaxed for teacher	← →	Not relaxed for teacher
8	Relaxed for student	← →	Not relaxed for student
9	Safe for students	← →	Unsafe for students
10	Easy for students	← →	Difficult for students

The sample chart prompts some interesting thoughts about the way in which the constructs are applied and how constructs tend to co-occur. From the chart, we can see that the construct *1 solitary/individual – group/interactive /dynamic* and construct 7 *relaxed for teacher – not relaxed for the teacher* lie along exactly the same plane, and in the same direction, suggesting that this particular teacher will see group work and other interactive modes as potentially quite challenging for the teacher, with learners working alone as much more relaxing for the teacher. Similarly, the constructs *2 creative – planned* and *4 unscripted – scripted* lie along the same plane as *3 scaffolding activity – collaborative* but in opposite directions, and quite close to constructs 1 and 7, suggesting a clustering that places tasks as either more solitary/individual, planned and scripted and relaxed for the teacher, or more creative, collaborative and interactive/dynamic and not relaxed for the teacher. Thus, whilst this particular teacher has not mentioned *teacher workload* as a construct in their perception of classroom tasks, it seems clear that they share a similar concern for the overall demand placed on the teacher, and how much work it involves. Interestingly, constructs *9 safe for the students – unsafe for the students* and *10 easy for the students – difficult for the students* also fall close to each other and in the same direction as constructs 1 and 7, suggesting that work that is solitary/individual, planned and scripted is likely to be not only relaxed for the teacher, but also *safe* and *easy* for the learners, in this teacher's view.

Similar charts were plotted for all five teachers to identify linked constructs across the teachers, and the extent to which it would be possible to suggest that there was a 'more towards this construct' or 'more towards that construct' clustering in the teachers' view of the classroom tasks. Table 8 presents the findings from this stage, where the listed constructs or very similar ones occurred in at least 3 of the 5 grids. Once again, it is important to remember that these are not the teachers' either/or descriptions, but rather

indications of how, in describing the tasks, their use of their constructs cluster together as 'more towards' one end of a construct cline or the other, such that the constructs listed on the left of the table will tend to co-occur in contrast to those constructs on the right of the table.

Table 8 Clustering of teacher constructs occurring on the same or a close plane.

sitting down just doing their work, solitary / individual	←——————→	group, interactive/dynamic
less hard work for the teacher	←——————→	hard work for the teacher
relaxed for the teacher	←——————→	not relaxed for the teacher
teacher-centred lesson, teacher guidance	←——————→	student-centred learning/thinking
scaffolding activity	←——————→	collaborative
scripted	←——————→	unscripted
rigid	←——————→	'free and easy'
students stays on task	←——————→	students can go off task
students have to contribute	←——————→	students might not contribute

Table 8 confirms the suggestion made in relation to the sample teacher's chart that the selected classroom tasks tend to imply an association between, on the one hand, student-centred group work and less relaxing, 'hard work' for the teacher, and, on the other hand, more relaxed and less work for the teacher when learners are guided and working alone. There is something of an irony here, when one considers that conventional wisdom suggests that more group work implies less work for the teacher; clearly, for these teachers, the unpredictable nature of student-centred work and their view that their students may *go off task* and *might not contribute* poses a greater challenge.

6 Discussion

The title of this paper posed a simple question: *Do teachers and school-aged learners inhabit the same classroom world?* The research methodology utilised in this project aimed to find an answer to this question by attempting to reveal how teachers and learners see the classroom, not against predetermined criteria in a questionnaire or rating scale, but in their own words. The methodology has shown itself as a potentially powerful means of doing that, as, in the case of the learners and teachers involved in this study, considerable differences in their perspective on the classroom have emerged.

Taking Allwright's (1989) distinction of the classroom as the venue for both a social event, in which interpersonal factors are especially relevant, and as a pedagogic event, in which curricular aims are foregrounded (elaborated on by Prabhu [1992]; see also Wright [2005] for a fuller exploration), we can see from looking at the learners' data that they are principally oriented towards the classroom as a social experience – in fact, as an opportunity to socialise. They emphasise the importance of an affectively positive experience in the classroom, that is, enjoying themselves – and they see this as principally related to whether they are working in groups, with their friends. Group work brings with it many benefits from this point of view in that they can enjoy *good vibes* and *chill* whilst simultaneously distributing the teacher's demands around members of the group by *taking it in turns to do the work*. The orientation seems to be towards surface compliance with the teacher's requests, and not actually focussing on any learning benefit from groupwork. We mentioned earlier the notable absence of any constructs which signal a concern with the learning value of different kinds of tasks, such as how far task types might help them get practice, or help them assess themselves, or allow them to stretch their abilities and our analysis here seems to explain why this might be the case. In short, we might say that these particular learners seem to see the

classroom as a venue, not for the management of their learning, but as a venue for the management of being taught.

In significant contrast to the learner data, the constructs produced by the teachers and our subsequent analysis show a very different perspective on the classroom. Rather than construing the lesson as a social event, we can see that the teachers principally see it as a pedagogic event, in which the teacher's plan (evidenced by the identification of constructs such as control of the classroom and addressing a teaching objective) is foremost in their mind. A consideration of the affective aspects of the use of different kinds of tasks does not appear to be a salient feature of their perspective. Our analysis has also signalled the teachers' concern with how far different kinds of tasks may increase their workload and make it more. Given the analysis of the learners' perspective, it is not difficult to understand why the teachers may see it this way. If the learners are principally oriented towards lessons as a social event, and teachers are oriented towards lessons as a pedagogic event, there is clearly a mismatch in what they are each looking for, and difficulties for teachers in implementing their plan are likely to result. A teacher's preference for more controlled, solitary student work – that is *scripted,* as one teacher expressed it, seems a likely and fully understandable response to trying to get the learners to focus on the task in hand.

A 'gap' between teachers' and learners' perspectives on the classroom has been suggested by a number of the researchers, as mentioned earlier. It perhaps therefore comes as no surprise that the data from the teachers and learners in this research project shows similarly significant differences. The open structure for the data collection in this project, however, has revealed a much more profound divergence of perspective, and has shown fundamental differences in the orientation of the teachers and learners to the

classroom, such that we can see ways in which they effectively attempt to engage in the management of the other, for differing purposes. Much of this happens beneath the surface. Neither party – that is, neither the teachers nor the learners - expressed any resistance or complaint about the other in our data collection, but appear, from the data, to just assume that that is the way it is. Whilst data from the grid does not directly indicate how respondents perceived the intentions of others in the classroom (that is, how teachers perceived learners and learners perceived teachers), it does seem from the constructs volunteered that both parties are essentially unaware of or unconcerned by what the other party is aiming for in the classroom.

7 Conclusion

This research project has shown the potential of using repertory grids as a fruitful way of investigating how far teachers and learners may share the same priorities and purposes in the classroom. The methodology has demonstrated its potential for allowing respondents a voice, unfiltered by a researcher's agenda, and has allowed us to answer our first research question concerning the way in which teachers and learners personally view the classroom. The findings from the data have shown that, in this particular case, a significant gap has been revealed in the teachers' and learners' perspectives on their lessons.

As noted earlier, and in our second research question, the principal assumption motivating this research project has been that if teachers' and learners' views on the classroom do not align, then it is highly unlikely that the teacher's goal of helping to bring about language learning, and a learners' goal of actually learning, will both be simultaneously achieved. In the data discussed here, we can see precisely this misalignment happening, and in this case, the construct data has shown that these

particular learners do not seem to be orientated towards a pedagogic goal at all, but are more concerned with achieving a social – or rather socialising - purpose. While this project has not attempted to relate these learners' views directly to data on their relative success and failure, it would certainly be a logical assumption that the misalignment of their views would not produce optimal conditions for learning achievement. The extent to which learners seek to pursue their own non-pedagogic goals in classroom work, in direct contrast to the teacher's objective, could be held to partly explain the extent to which learners are found to underachieve in relation to the official syllabus.

Our third research question asked about the implications that any divergence in perspective may have for the way teaching and learning are organised. The significant difference in perspective that this project has revealed may in part explain why it is that these particular teachers may feel the need to resort to controlled, teacher-centred activities to 'get learning done'. Given the thrust of contemporary thinking, teacher strategies which emphasise control and learners working alone may seem at odds with the eventual aims of language teaching. Yet, we can see that these teachers are probably reacting pragmatically to what they see as possible to achieve in their own classrooms. Their strongly evident concern with teacher workload suggests that they find teaching a continual challenge, and that they may be working against, and not with, their students. Given the low incidence of constructs concerned with learners' affective reaction, we can suggest that the teachers necessarily feel that their priority is to simply get teaching done.

But how could this be different? One immediate realisation from the data is that the learners are intensely social in their orientation to the classroom. As suggested by constructivist theories of education, effective learning *is* social in nature, so it would

seem that one potential route for teachers to explore is how the learners' ready disposition for socialising could be channelled towards pedagogic purposes, by showing them how they can engage in effective, managed groupwork activities (for example, by allocating group roles such as chairperson, secretary, timekeeper, etc.). Yet, the fundamental issue is the evident gap between teachers' and learners' perspectives. How can this be closed, such that they are all working in the same direction? We would argue that the principal problem is the absence of good communication between teachers and learners. Good communication enables learners to understand why the teacher is asking them to do certain kinds of tasks and the value this has in language learning, and enables teachers to understand learners' reasons for preferences in ways of working and choices in what they are working on. Beyond this, however, we would argue that this also suggests the need to involve learners in a significant way in the planning of their own lessons, in making decisions, and discussing and reflecting on those decisions, in relation to the goals for their lessons, how they will be working, with what content and how they will be able to measure and evaluate their relative success. Documented accounts of trying to do this at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, such as those recorded in the landmark collection by Breen and Littlejohn (2000) and in other papers by Abdelmalak (2015), Boon (2011), Bovill, Morss, and Bulley (2009), Brown (2012), Hudd (2003), and Gourlay (2005) demonstrate how shared decision-making is fully achievable. Such an approach to classroom work, however, suggests a radical departure from the way teaching and learning is conventionally organised, and may pose very real challenges for teachers' and learners' expectations, and local constraints such as examinations and school policies. Such difficulties, however, are typically encountered with any kind of innovation in education. The key is to determine what is contextually feasible and to proceed in a gradual manner in sharing those decisions that

can be shared. It is only through bridging a communication gap in both directions and in sharing decisions that teachers and learners may begin to inhabit the same classroom world.

While the data have revealed significant differences in the teachers' and learners' perceptions, it is important to remember that the data are highly localised, personal perceptions. As such, generalisations beyond the context of data collection, and the individuals concerned, must be approached with caution. Nevertheless, the finding that there are unvoiced perceptions here which may inhibit the potential learning should give pause for thought to any educator teaching in a context where the expression of learners' views on course management are not actively encouraged and acted upon. It also suggests that the familiar one-time, end of course evaluation offered to students in many institutions is far too limited in scope to be of great use, as it will come too late for those taking the course, and will not solve the problem of possible differences in perspective between the teachers and the next intake of learners. Clearly, as suggested earlier, the opening up of communication channels between teachers and students in relation to course decisions needs to be an ongoing feature of the classroom.

One immediate limitation of the research described here is the significant amount of time that is required to collect and interpret repertory grid data. Earlier, we argued that there is a danger in data collection methods, such as survey and interview designs, that prioritise researchers' concerns as they may mask the true nature of the respondents' priorities. The repertory grid methodology that we have utilised has shown itself to be a useful means of reducing that danger, but it would be impractical for any large scale data collection. Whilst being cautious of generalising beyond the personal nature of the repertory grid, it may, however, be possible to utilise repertory grid data from a sample

of teachers and learners as a basis for survey design – to see how far the constructs expressed by the sample respondents are shared by a wider population. The virtue of such a design would be that it is based on priorities expressed by repertory grid respondents in similar roles and contexts as the survey respondents. This may enable a greater degree of confidence in survey results. Parallel repertory grid data from a subset of the survey respondents could test how far this was true and how far surveys based on repertory grid data may be used as a reliable means of data collection. Certainly, the potential of the repertory grid technique has shown itself to be a valuable means of data collection that can be incorporated into future research projects.

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