

Using repertory grids when preparing adolescents for research activities

Denis V. Sushkov, postgraduate student

of Chair of Methodology of Education, Pedagogical Institute

Saratov Chernyshevsky State University, Saratov (Russia)

E-mail: denissushkov64@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0826-8583>

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Abstract: The author raises the problem of conscious choice of research topics by the students. Despite the importance of educational research in the educational process, its organization in practice is often formal and superficial; therefore, its influence on the development of personal meanings of students is not great. One of the possible solutions to this problem is using the repertory grid technique when choosing a research topic. The aim of the work is to adapt the repertory grid technique of G. Kelly to help students choose a research topic, as well as develop self-knowledge and self-reflection skills. The methodological basis of the study was the works of the American psychologist G. Kelly on the theory of personal constructs, and the Role Construct Repertory Test, or Test of Personal Constructs developed on their basis. The paper describes an adapted algorithm of the repertory grid technique, including a preparatory stage, a stage of construct generation, a stage of grid construction, analysis and recommendations, and an example of a fragment of a possible grid. The analysis of the obtained data is carried out in three directions: quantitative (assessment of the complexity of the personality semantic organization and the structure of preferences), qualitative (identification of dominant meanings, contradictions and hierarchy of constructs), and thematic analysis (grouping of topics according to similar criteria). The author has analyzed separately strategies for work with difficulties arising during testing, including the polysemy of interpretation of many constructs, resistance to reflection, superficiality of answers and taboo nature of some research topics. The practical significance of the work lies in the fact that the proposed adaptation of the test of personal constructs can be used to organize academic and research activities of schoolchildren when choosing a research topic, as well as a tool for self-reflection of adolescents.

Keywords: development of personal meanings of students; development of personal meanings during research activities; repertory grid technique; personal meanings; research activities of adolescents; educational research.

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INTRODUCTION

Organization of research activities of students is an integral part of the modern educational process. In the modern world, the ability to analyze, systematize information and the development of critical thinking are becoming increasingly relevant, and educational research can be considered as an effective tool for the formation of these skills. Note that the importance of using research methods in education is reflected in the requirements of the federal educational standard. At the same time, federal standards contain requirements for the development of personal learning outcomes of students, such as readiness for self-development, independence and personal self-determination. The technology of research activity has all the necessary resources for the formation of these skills. In this regard, each teacher, when designing and organizing educational research, must consider their educational potential for the development of personal meanings of students.

This paper substantiates the potential of the repertory grid technique as a tool for personality development, contributing to an increase in the meaningfulness of research activities carried out by adolescents. The author proposes

the adaptation of the personal construct test for use when organizing the academic and research activities of schoolchildren, including stages of analysis of test results, recommendations for teachers and students, difficulties of the procedure and ways to overcome them.

Attention to the semantic sphere of personality is reflected in the works of many Russian [1; 2] and foreign psychologists [3; 4]. Their works contain general fundamental provisions on the desire and search for meaning, as well as the dynamic nature of the semantic system of personality. The methodological basis of the study was the works of the American psychologist G. Kelly on the theory of personal constructs and the Role Construct Repertory Test (repertory grid technique), or Test of Personal Constructs [5] developed on their basis.

According to G. Kelly's theory, each personal construct is a pair of contradictions (for example, "interesting – boring"). They are limited in the scope of their application and are an individual generalization of previous experience, forming a human personality understood as a system of personal constructs. The test of personal constructs allows identifying the specified system, since

it provides a person with the opportunity to express and describe his inner world in his "own language", using "individual terminology".

Note that the application of G. Kelly's technique is described in many papers by Russian researchers. Most authors reveal its diagnostic potential and use it to study the self-image of adolescents [6], cognitive differentiation in the sphere of communication [7], or as a method of theoretical reflection [8]. It is worth highlighting separately the work [9] covering the features of the application of repertory grids for the formation of individual learning paths. The method of repertory grids in [9] is considered as a tool within the framework of the process of education individualization analyzed and studied in detail in many works of the author [10; 11]. In the latest scientific publications, G. Kelly's method is considered primarily as a tool for diagnosing moral self-assessment [12] or age-related features of using computer vocabulary [13]. In [14], this method is used to study the features of professional improvisation of a preschool teacher. From the presented review, it is clear that in all the cited sources, with the exception of [9], the repertory grid technique is considered exclusively as a tool for diagnosing certain aspects of the system of personal meanings and in none of them as a tool for their development. Thus, it should be concluded that the issue of using the test of personal constructs within the process of education individualization or the organization of educational research activities remains unexplored.

The problem of organizing research activities is also considered in the works of many Russian authors. In [15], a model for organizing students' research activities is proposed. For our study, an element of this model is important related to the author's position of the student in the study, suggesting that the student acts "in accordance with his interests and preferences, takes a creative, author's position when performing the study" [15]. At the same time, we note that a consistent system of means and methods for developing such a position is not proposed. In the work [16], various reasons for studying and developing research activities are analyzed. Despite the importance of studying and diagnostics within the framework of educational research, the author [16] states, "intelligence tests do not contribute to or even suppress the manifestations of independent research behavior." Here, as well, no holistic solution to the indicated contradiction is proposed, in which the testing technique would act not as a form of suppression, but as a tool for personal development. In the work [17], the first stage of educational research – the choice of a research topic that requires interest and relevance is highlighted, however, a consistent system of steps for achieving the specified conditions is not proposed.

Various aspects of the personality-oriented paradigm dominating in modern pedagogy are analyzed in the works of many authors. Thus, the features of the formation of individual learning paths and self-reflection are considered in detail in [18]. It is worth highlighting such aspects of the formation of axiological grounds for adolescents' activities as the search for values and mean-

ing, as well as reflection. Tendencies towards individualization and support of personal development are especially evident in the organization of educational research. A.V. Khutorskoy suggests considering research competence as a 'component of personal self-improvement' [19], therefore, its formation within the educational process seems especially important.

Directly for project and research activities, a model for constructing individual learning paths, which involves their construction through solving complex problems, was proposed in [20]. The authors conclude that today, there is no holistic system for constructing individual paths, which can lead to insufficiently substantiated professional self-determination in the future. Similarly, aspects of tutor support of an individual learning path are considered in [21]. This paper presents five modules of tutor support; we highlight the diagnostic-orientational, design and reflective-correctional modules, the elements of which are contained in the algorithm we propose.

Among foreign authors, special interest in project and research activities emerged during the 2020 pandemic. In [22], project and research activities are considered as a means of developing critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork and communication, which is especially effective in the context of online education. However, the authors do not focus on the development of a system of personal meanings and self-reflection skills, despite the significant opportunities offered by the technology of research activities in this direction.

Despite the importance of using the technology of research activities in the educational process, due to both the requirements of state standards and the recommendations of teachers and psychologists, its practical implementation is often formal and superficial. There is a lack of meaningfulness and understanding of the importance of educational and research activities on the part of both students and teachers [23]. Due to this circumstance, it is necessary to develop new approaches to organizing research activities at school, one of which is proposed in our paper.

The aim of this work is to adapt the repertory grid technique of G. Kelly to help students in choosing the topic of research activities, as well as in developing the self-knowledge and self-reflection skills.

METHODS

When developing the adaptation of the repertory grid technique, the principle of the axiological orientation of educational activity was chosen as the central one. Its implementation assumes that within the educational process, students form and develop a system of personal meanings. This principle is closely linked with the principle of subjectivity, which assumes a view of a child as a full-fledged subject of his own development, capable of independent goal-setting, free creativity and reflection of the semantic bases of his own activity.

To implement the adaptation of G. Kelly's technique, educational research activity was chosen, implemented within the educational organization both during the les-

son and outside of class time. The choice is caused by the fact that the technology of educational research has significant educational potential, which can be used to develop the personal sphere of students and promote their creative self-expression.

The technique involves helping students in choosing a research topic and developing a system of personal meanings by stimulating them to self-reflect on the axiological foundations of their own activities. The algorithm includes a preparatory stage, when primary motivation is carried out and a brainstorming session is held, during which lines of research are proposed; a stage of generating individual constructs and building a grid by students; a stage of analysis and recommendations for formulating a research topic.

Throughout the entire period of implementing the technique, the teacher performs a guiding supportive function. He or she organizes the process at the stage of preparation and brainstorming, provides personal assistance in the event of difficulties in generating constructs and building a repertory grid, and, together with students, analyzes the results obtained and helps with the formulation of the research topic.

The analysis of the obtained data is carried out in three directions: quantitative (assessment of the complexity of the personality semantic organization and the structure of preferences), qualitative (identification of dominant meanings, contradictions and hierarchy of constructs), and thematic analysis (grouping of topics according to similar criteria).

RESULTS

1. Scope of application of the technique

The previously noted lack of meaningfulness and understanding of the significance of educational research activities is observed already at the preparatory stage of choosing a research topic, which is sometimes carried out not based on the internal needs of the developing personality, but based on "simplicity" – from a ready-made list of topics. As a result, the developmental potential of research project is reduced significantly: from a development tool, it becomes a tool for obtaining an assessment.

One of the possible ways to overcome the difficulty described above will be the inclusion of reflexive practices in the process of educational research. In our opinion, the repertory grid technique has both high diagnostic capabilities and significant potential as a tool for personality development. The test of personal constructs can be adapted for use when organizing academic research activity of schoolchildren and become one of its elements.

The goals of using the repertory grid technique within educational research vary and contain several directions. The first such direction implies the traditional application of this technique aimed at diagnosing the personal sphere of students, including identifying individual constructs, analyzing these constructs and formulating individual recommendations on their basis. Another group of goals is associated with the process of individualization in education, since the proposed algorithm is

designed to help in choosing a research topic that meets the needs, interests and capabilities of a developing personality. The third goal aimed at increasing the motivation of students naturally follows from providing assistance in individualization; it is achieved by choosing a research topic based on personal interests, as well as identifying and taking into account unreflected motives. All the above-described directions are designed to achieve the last and main goal – the goal of development. It implies the expansion of the system of personal constructs, the generation of new constructs, as well as the acquisition of self-reflection experience by students.

2. Technique description

2.1. Research topic selection

The use of repertory grids when choosing a topic for a research project involves the sequential application of several steps. The first stage is group. Using the brainstorming method in the group, the initial lines of research are formulated. Then individual work begins. Each student independently and randomly selects three topics. Control questions for the student: "How are the two topics alike?", "How does the third topic differ from the others?", "How would you call this feature?"

The answers (obtained constructs) are recorded in the format of opposite scales. This process is repeated for another trio of topics. The task is to identify as many individual constructs as possible. For example, for the "Poetry", "Robotics", and "Fashion" trio of areas, the "creative process – technical skill" construct can be identified in the course of the study. If students have difficulties in formulating constructs, the teacher helps them with guiding questions. Table 1 presents the complete template of the algorithm for applying the specified technique. The presented template is an approximate description; its individual elements can be adjusted depending on specific conditions. Table 2 shows an example of applying the repertory grid technique at the stage of choosing a research topic.

It is worth speaking separately about the stage of analysis and formulation of recommendations based on the results of applying the technique. The analysis of the obtained repertory grids can be carried out in three directions presented in Table 3.

2.2. Quantitative analysis

The first direction of analysis is quantitative analysis. The number of constructs generated during testing allows judging the flexibility of thinking and the complexity of the semantic organization of the person. When conducting this type of analysis, one should take into account the age of the person being tested, because the older the teenager, the greater the number of constructs he or she is able to formulate. If too few constructs are formulated (eight or less), this may indicate superficiality of thinking, while a large number of them (more than twenty), on the contrary, indicates high flexibility of thinking and his/her ability to solve complex problems.

Within the quantitative analysis, one should consider the distribution of assessments. Thus, the research areas that

Table 1. Algorithm for the application of repertory grids within educational research
Таблица 1. Алгоритм применения репертурных решеток в учебном исследовании

Stage	Goal/Content	Description
Preparatory	Group work, expanding the scope of research topics	Preparing the class, explaining the essence of the technique. Using the brainstorming method, students suggest 20–30 possible topics / research areas
Generating constructs	Identifying personal constructs, developing reflection	Each student selects three topics from the topics received and indicates how two topics differ from the third. To avoid bias, it is better to select topics in a random order
Building a repertory grid	Visualization of constructs, identifying contradictions	Based on the resulting polar constructs and the selected topics, students build an individual table
Analysis of results	Making recommendations	Joint analysis of the resulting table according to the criteria of the number of constructs, the distribution of “positive” assessments for each topic, the identification of clusters, dominant constructs and contradictions
Recommendations	Correction of the topic considering the results of the analysis	Personalization of training, identification of priority topics, elaboration of topics that cause difficulty or concern, planning group work

Table 2. An example of a fragment of a possible repertory grid of a researcher
Таблица 2. Пример фрагмента возможной репертурной решетки исследователя

Constructs	Topics / research areas					
	Local ecology	Game development	Artificial intelligence	Modern literature	Fashion	Youth movement
Difficult (d)	d	e	d	d	e	e
Easy (e)						
Relevant (r)	r	o	r	o	o	r
Obsolete (o)						
Creative (cr)	tech	tech	tech	cr	cr	cr
Technical (tech)						
Global (g)	l	g	g	g	l	g
Local (l)						
Theoretical (t)	p	p	t	t	t	t
Practical (p)						

received the largest number of positive assessments (for example, “important”, “interesting”, “advanced”) should be considered preferable. Areas that received contradictory assessments require separate discussion and elaboration.

2.3. Qualitative analysis

The second direction of analysis of the results obtained during testing is qualitative analysis focusing on the content of constructs. The teacher can determine

which groups of criteria the student uses to evaluate research topics and identify the dominant ones. The resulting individual profile may be dominated by constructs with a pronounced emotional component (e.g., “inspiring – oppressive”, “fascinating – boring”), a practical component (“useful – harmful”, “promising – unpromising”), etc. Such dominants allow better determining which personality traits should be primarily relied upon when choosing a topic and signaling problems. For example,

Table 3. Directions for analysis of students' repertory grids
Таблица 3. Направления анализа репертуарных решеток учащихся

Analysis type	Goal	Criteria
Quantitative	Assess the complexity of the semantic organization of personality and the structure of preferences	Number of constructs
		Distribution of assessments
Qualitative	Identify dominant meanings, contradictions and hierarchy of constructs	Dominant constructs
		Contradictions
		Hierarchy of constructs
Thematic (cluster)	Grouping of topics by similar criteria	Similar assessments

if constructs such as "easy – difficult" prevail, this may be a marker of fear of failure or self-doubt.

Qualitative analysis also allows identifying the hierarchy of the test subject's constructs. In G. Kelly's theory, superordinate (high-level) and subordinate (secondary) constructs are distinguished. Basic constructs are usually associated with the most important personal values; they are mentioned among the first and more often than others are.

In the context of qualitative analysis, it is possible as well to identify contradictions and internal conflicts that influence the choice of topic. Thus, the same topic can be assigned both the construct "promising" and the construct "difficult", which can signal interest in the topic, but also the presence of fear associated with difficulties or possible failure, which can block the choice of topic. The research topic can be characterized as "important", but at the same time "boring", which indicates awareness of the significance of the topic, but the absence of personal interest or emotional connection with it. Contradictions identified through such analysis require individual pedagogical development.

2.4. Thematic (cluster) analysis

The third type of analysis of the obtained repertory grids involves identifying semantic connections between the formulated topics or constructs and combining them into separate groups (clusters). This type of analysis makes it easier to choose a research topic by identifying the main areas of interest of an adolescent. Except for determining the priorities, it is convenient during cluster analysis to construct interdisciplinary studies, collecting various studies on the subject received the greatest number of positive assessments (for example, "Artificial Intelligence + Ecology") in one project. To broaden horizons and form new meanings, it is possible to add elements from a "foreign" cluster to the priority areas, for example, to give guidance to students with a pronounced technical and weakly manifested creative profile towards the "Digital Art" area.

3. Example of the technique implementation

Let us give simple examples of the described technique application to identify the individual research profile of a student and formulate recommendations based on it. For

example, only five constructs were formulated during testing, with most topics being rated as "interesting" (games, sports) or "boring" (science, art). In this case, the "Find Five Differences" game should be offered for non-obvious trios: compare "Football", "Physics", and "Music". This will allow identifying new constructs (for example, "creative – standard"). As a result, the research topic can be formulated at the intersection of "interesting" and "boring": "Physics of a soccer ball: what influences the trajectory".

In the second case, the following basic constructs were identified during testing: "interesting – boring", "difficult – easy", "promising – useless". By qualitative analysis, it was found that topics related to information technology were marked as "interesting + difficult", and topics on humanities were marked as "easy + boring". When choosing, preference was given to the group of "easy" topics, which may indicate a fear of failure influencing the choice. A solution option in this case may be to choose a topic from the "Information Technology" cluster, but with a low entry threshold for a specific student. Such a choice will allow a student to begin developing in the direction of interest to him, despite the existing uncertainty. In another test, a contradiction may be revealed between personal interests and hobbies – "creative + unpromising" and importance for a future career – "standard + useful". An interdisciplinary project may serve as an option for resolving the contradiction in this case.

4. Recommendations for teachers

It should be noted that the main advantage of G. Kelly's technique is based on the possibility of expressing the subjective experience of a person in his "individual language" using his own "terminology". This advantage also conceals its main disadvantage, which is that a person is not always able to describe adequately his personal experience and select precise characteristics for it. When working with adolescents, this disadvantage often manifests itself especially clearly. For example, such a construct as "useful", as applied to areas of research, can be interpreted in different ways: "useful for me personally", "useful for a career", "useful for my city", "useful for society", "useful for the country" and many others. At the same time, even close interpretations, such as "useful for me personally"

and "useful for my career", still imply different shades of meaning. Therefore, individual study of selected constructs with students (for example, "What does the word 'useful' mean to you?") is important and mandatory.

When organizing testing, the teacher may encounter the problem of reluctance and resistance on the part of students. One of the reasons is that the work involves a certain amount of time and can be quite monotonous in some parts (filling in the repertory grid). A possible solution to the problem in this case would be to include game elements. This could be an interest map with colored labels and stickers (especially for younger teenagers) or a competition (for example, "Who will find more unexpected similarities between different topics").

It should also be taken into account that a number of students may painfully perceive some research topics for various reasons, since these topics are associated with their own negative experience or are taboo in the family. The teacher should closely monitor this and replace potentially problematic topics with more neutrally colored analogues.

DISCUSSION

The author's algorithm for adapting the G. Kelly's repertory grid technique is proposed. It is intended to help students make a conscious choice of a research topic that takes into account their interests and preferences. However, the algorithm described in the paper should not be considered only as an assistant in choosing a topic – its pedagogical potential is much higher.

Analysis of scientific literature shows that in most works, G. Kelly's technique is used exclusively as a means of diagnosing various aspects of the semantic sphere of test takers [8; 12; 13]. The adaptation we have developed allows increasing significantly the pedagogical potential of the technique, turning it from a tool for diagnosing personal meanings into a tool for their development. Among the features of the technique, the following should be highlighted:

- retention of the diagnostic function of the method, which allows discovering the personal constructs of adolescents and describing their worldview in their "own language";
- focus on individualization of learning and building an individual research path, taking into account the personal characteristics of students, aimed at increasing their motivation and personal interest in research activities;
- focus on developing students' reflective skills and understanding the axiological foundations of their own activities.

The scientific novelty of the work lies in the description and disclosure of the potential of the G. Kelly's Test of Personal Constructs technique as a tool for students' conscious choice of a research topic and for the development of self-knowledge and self-reflection skills. Its practical significance is manifested in the development of an adaptation of the Test of Personal Constructs for use in organizing students' educational and research activities.

The use of the described technique will allow adolescents to acquire valuable experience in self-reflection and awareness, which must be preserved and expanded at each new stage of educational research. Only in this case, re-

search activity will turn from a dry formality into an effective tool for the child's intellectual and personal development, and the choice of a research topic into a process of conscious self-determination, when the student both finds a direction for work and learns to understand his or her strengths and limitations.

CONCLUSIONS

The algorithm we propose is one of the ways to individualize research activity. Its use in school will allow transforming the formal choice of topic into a conscious process of self-determination, acquiring skills of reflection and critical thinking, creating a basis for a long-term research trajectory of an adolescent. Thus, the use of this technique contributes to the development of the semantic sphere of the students' personalities.

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Использование репертуарных решеток при подготовке исследовательской деятельности подростков

Сушков Денис Владимирович, аспирант

кафедры методологии образования Педагогического института

*Саратовский национальный исследовательский государственный университет имени Н.Г. Чернышевского,
Саратов (Россия)*

E-mail: denissushkov64@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0826-8583>

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Аннотация: Поднимается проблема осознанного выбора учащимися тем исследовательских работ. Несмотря на важность учебных исследований в образовательном процессе, их организация на практике зачастую носит формальный поверхностный характер, в результате чего их влияние на развитие личностных смыслов учащихся невелико. Одним из возможных вариантов решения указанной проблемы является использование при выборе темы исследования методики репертуарных решеток. Цель работы – адаптация методики репертуарных решеток Дж. Келли для помощи учащимся в выборе темы исследовательской деятельности, а также в развитии навыков самопознания и саморефлексии. Методологической основой исследования стали работы американского психолога Дж. Келли, посвященные теории личностных конструкторов, и разработанный на их основе «Репертуарный тест ролевых конструкторов», или «Тест личных конструкторов». В статье описан адаптированный алгоритм методики репертуарных решеток, включающий подготовительный этап, этап генерации конструкторов, этап построения решетки, анализ и рекомендации, а также пример фрагмента возможной решетки. Анализ полученных данных осуществляется по трем направлениям: количественный (оценка сложности смысловой организации личности и структуры предпочтений), качественный (выявление доминирующих смыслов, противоречий и иерархии конструкторов) и тематический анализ (группировка тем по близким критериям). Отдельно разобраны и проанализированы стратегии работы с затруднениями, возникающими при тестировании, включающие многозначность интерпретации множества конструкторов, сопротивление рефлексии, поверхностность ответов и табуированность некоторых тем исследований. Практическая значимость работы заключается в том, что предложенная адаптация теста личностных конструкторов может быть использована для организации учебно-исследовательской деятельности школьников при выборе темы исследования, а также как инструмент саморефлексии подростков.

Ключевые слова: развитие личностных смыслов учащихся; развитие личностных смыслов в исследовательской деятельности; методика репертуарных решеток; личностные смыслы; исследовательская деятельность подростков; учебное исследование.

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