

# **Auditing the communicating classroom:**

Participating with schools to change practice

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# The Communication Supporting Classroom Observational Tool (CSCoT)



## Language learning environment

*the physical environment and learning context*

## Language learning opportunities

*the structured opportunities to support children's language development*

## Language learning interactions

*the ways in which adults in the setting talk with children*

## LANGUAGE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:

The classroom is organised to emphasise open space. <sup>1,4,6</sup>
Learning areas are clearly defined throughout the classroom. <sup>1, 2,3,4,5,6,7,8,12</sup>
Learning areas are clearly labelled with pictures/words throughout the classroom. <sup>1, 2,3,4,5,6,7,8,12</sup>
There is space for privacy or quiet areas where children can retreat to have 'down time' or engage in smaller group activities. These areas are less visually distracting. <sup>1,3,4,5,6,7,8</sup>
Children's own work is displayed and labelled appropriately. <sup>5,6,7,8</sup>
Some classroom displays include items that invite comments from children. <sup>5,6,7,8</sup>
Book specific areas are available. <sup>1, 3,4,5,6,7,8</sup>
Literacy specific areas are available. <sup>1, 3,4,5,6,7,8</sup>
Background noise levels are managed consistently throughout the observation, and children and adults are able to hear one another with ease. <sup>4,6,9,10</sup>
Transition times are managed effectively, so that noise levels are not excessive and children know what to expect next. <sup>4,5,7,9,10</sup>
There is good light. <sup>4,5,6,8,11</sup>
The majority of learning resources and materials are labelled with pictures/words. <sup>4,5,6,7,12</sup>
Resources that are available for free play are easily reached by the children or easily within their line of vision. <sup>4,5,6,7,8</sup>
An appropriate range of books is available in the book area (for example, traditional stories, bilingual/dual language books and a variety of genres and books related to children's own experiences). <sup>13</sup>
Non-fiction books, books on specific topics or interests of the children are also available in other learning areas. <sup>13</sup>
Outdoor play (if available) includes imaginative role play. <sup>7,8,37</sup>
Good quality toys, small world objects and real / natural resources are available. <sup>1, 2,4,5,6,7,8,36,37</sup>
Musical instruments and noise makers are available. <sup>1, 2,4,5,6,7,8,36,37</sup>
Role play area is available. <sup>1, 2,4,5,6,7,8,36,37</sup>

## LANGUAGE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Small group work facilitated by an adult takes place. <sup>14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20,21</sup>

Children have opportunities to engage in interactive book reading facilitated by an adult (for example: asking predictive questions, joining in with repetitions, story packs etc. <sup>15, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29,30</sup>

Children have opportunities to engage in structured conversations with teachers and other adults. <sup>31,32,33,34</sup>

Children have opportunities to engage in structured conversations with peers (Talking partners). <sup>35</sup>

Less-talkative children are included. <sup>60</sup>

## LANGUAGE LEARNING INTERACTIONS

Adults use children's name, draw attention of children.<sup>38,39</sup>

Adults get down to the child's level when interacting with them.<sup>38,39,40</sup>

Natural gestures and some key word signing are used in interactions with children.<sup>40,41,42</sup>

Adults use symbols, pictures and props (real objects) to reinforce language.<sup>1</sup>

Waiting: Adult uses a slow pace during conversation; give children plenty of time to respond and take turns in interacting with them.<sup>1,17,43,44,45,46</sup>

Pausing: Adult pauses expectantly and frequently during interactions with children to encourage their turn-taking and active participation.<sup>1,17,43,44,45,46</sup>

Confirming: Adult responds to the majority of child utterances by confirming understanding of the child's intentions. Adult does not ignore child's communicative bids.<sup>1,17,43,44,45,46</sup>

Imitating: Adult imitates and repeats what child says more or less exactly.<sup>1,17,43,44,45,46</sup>

Commenting: adults comment on what is happening or what children are doing at that time.<sup>1,17,43,44,45,46,47,50</sup>

Extending: Adult repeats what child says and adds a small amount of syntactic or semantic information.

Labelling: Adult provides the labels for familiar and unfamiliar actions, objects, or abstractions (e.g. feelings).

Adult encourages children to use new words in their own talking.

Open questioning: adults ask open-ended questions that extend children's thinking

Scripting: Adult provides a routine to the child for representing an activity (e.g. First, you go up to the counter. Then you say 'I want milk..') and engages the child in known routines<sup>1,17,43,44,45,46</sup>

Adults provide children with choices (for example: 'Would you like to read a story or play on the computer?').<sup>1</sup>

Adults use contrasts that highlight differences in lexical items and in syntactic structures.<sup>57,58</sup>

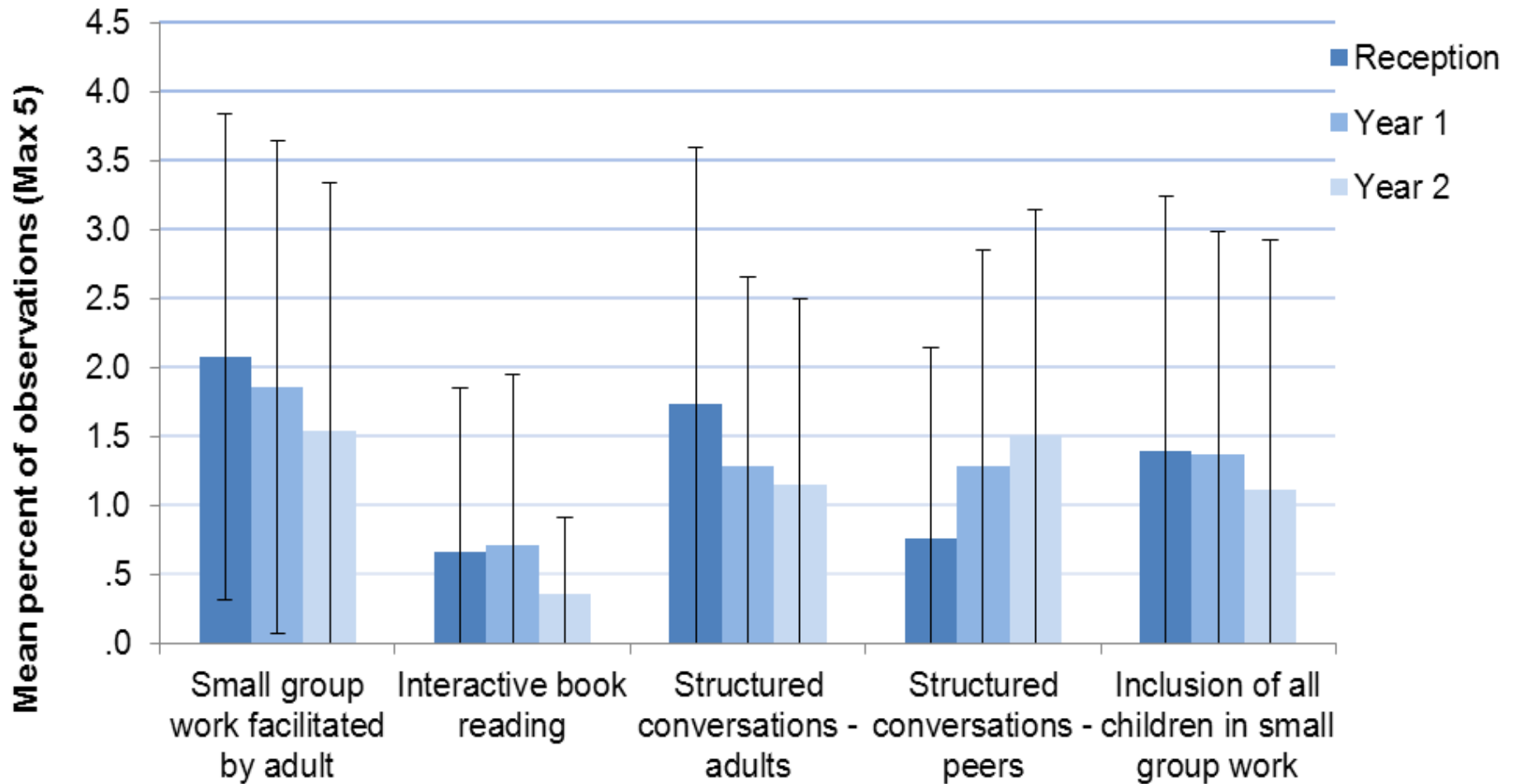
Adults model language that the children are not producing yet.<sup>57,58</sup>

Turn-taking is encouraged.<sup>60</sup>

Children's listening skills and non-verbal communication is praised.<sup>60</sup>

# Original data..

## Dockrell et al. 2013



# Language Learning Interactions



## by Year Group (5 most/least common)

Items	Reception ( <i>n</i> = 38)	Year 1 ( <i>n</i> = 35)	Year 2 ( <i>n</i> = 28)	Total across Year Groups
Using children's names	3.8 (1.6)	4.4 (1.1)	4.2 (1.3)	4.1 (1.4)
Using natural gestures	3.4 (1.9)	3.3 (2.4)	3.3 (1.9)	3.3 (2.0)
Confirming oral language initiations	3.4 (1.9)	3.2 (1.8)	3.1 (2.0)	3.3 (1.9)
Supporting listening skills	1.0 (1.5)	1.6 (1.9)	1.0 (1.0)	1.2 (1.6)
Encouraging turn taking	.8 (1.0)	1.0 (1.1)	.9 (1.3)	.9 (1.1)
Oral scripting of activities	.6 (.9)	.8 (1.1)	1.2 (1.5)	.8 (1.2)

# This study..

- Teesside schools involved in the North East literacy campaign run by the Education Endowment Foundation in conjunction with the Northern Rock Foundation
- Two authorities prioritised early years language and opted to work with us using the CSCOT as an audited starting point
- This study reports the results of this study including both the findings and the views of teaching staff about CSCOT.



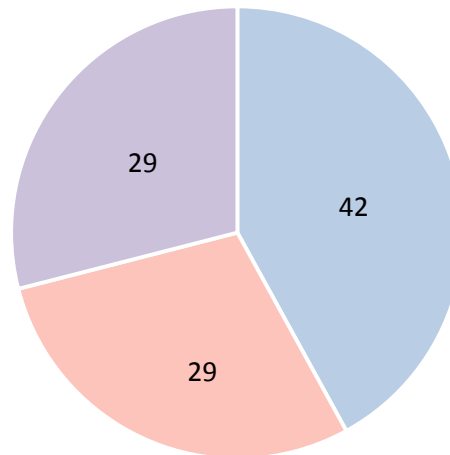
# Preliminary Results – CsCOT Participation



Number of participating schools:-

Hartlepool: 16  
Middlesbrough: 20

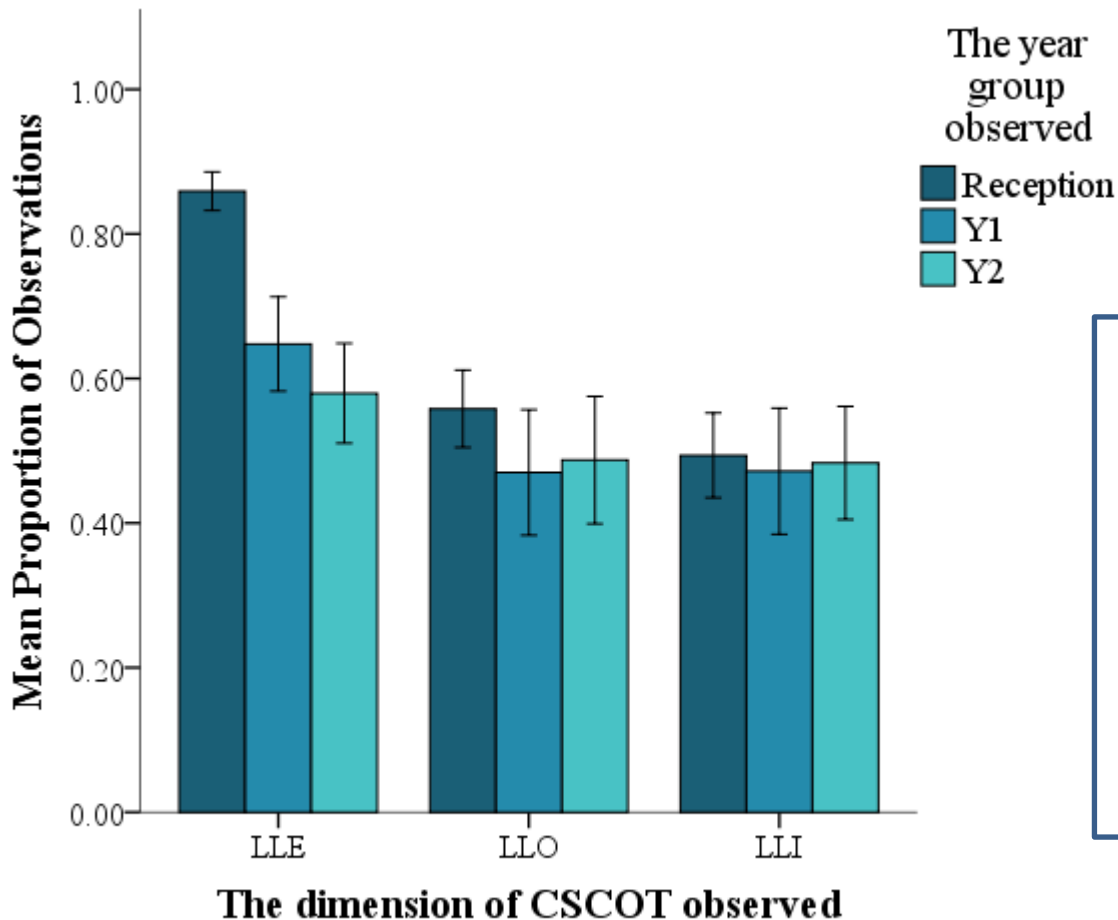
**Number of observations completed per year group**  
Total observations=100



■ Reception ■ Year 1 ■ Year 2

# Preliminary Results

Mean (+/- SD) Proportion Score for CsC OT  
Dimensions by School Year



Statistically significant differences  
for:-

**School Year and Dimension**

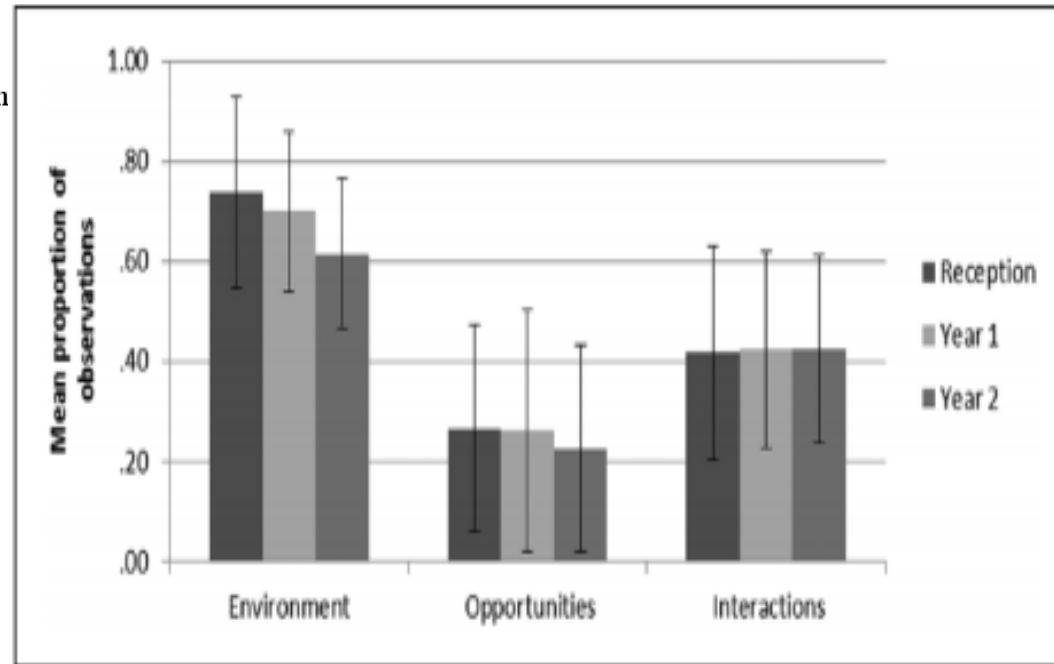
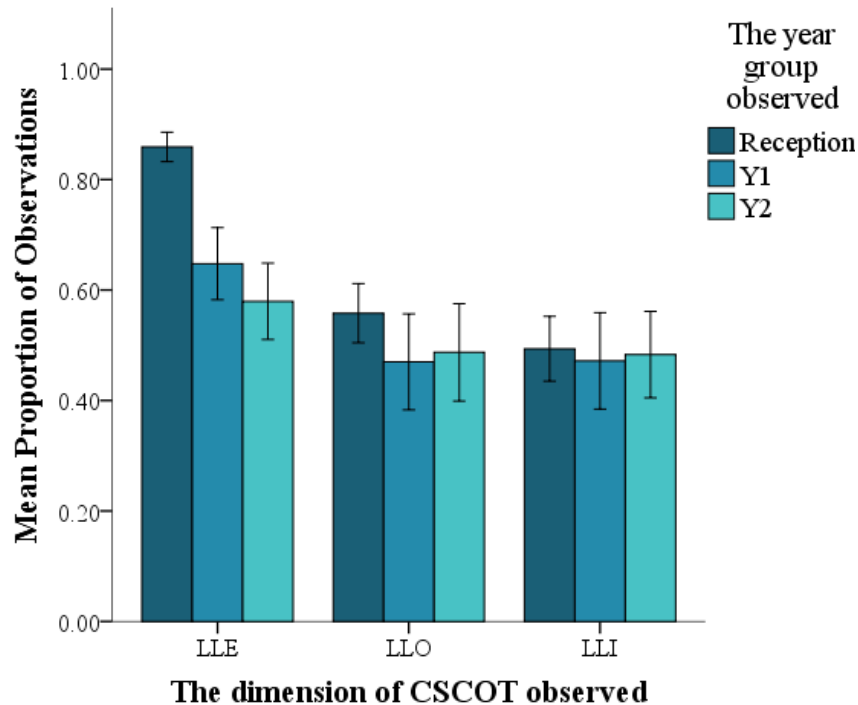
and moderate interaction

**School Year\*Dimension**

# Preliminary Results

Mean (+/- SD) Proportion Score for CsCOT Dimensions by School Year

Original Dockrell et al. data



# Staff feedback – Accessibility, Logistics and Utility



- ✓ **The CSCOT is simple to complete.**
- ✓ **The CSCOT guidance is clear.**
- ✓ **The CSCOT helped inform practitioners of their practice and further development, with increased:**
  1. Program use (**48%**);
  2. Confidence in programme procedures (**38%**);
  3. Confidence in discussing children with SLCN with SLTs (**67%**);
  4. Practitioners also agreed that teachers and teaching staff require further training on oral language and communication skills and needs in their school (**54%**)

# Staff feedback – Accessibility, Logistics and Utility



- ~ Mixed reports of comfort of teachers being observed.
- ~ Some responders stated observations were not an adequate length, which they thought affected their CSCOT scorings.
- ~ There were some issues with KS1 and items that emphasised play.
- ~ **LLO** and **LLI**-based items were reported by some to not 'fit' with the more structured environments and teaching of KS1.
- ~ Some items of the CSCOT were not considered applicable to particular lesson types.

## = **Create more standardized and specific instructions?...**

> Teachers also reported difficulties with workloads, finding cover for lessons and knowledge of the CSCOT process, which may be in part linked to the above issues.

## = **Inflexible tool?...**

> It is explicitly acknowledged by the creators of the CSCOT that not every item will show up in each lesson/ lesson type observation.

# Staff feedback – Differences between Reception and KS1



Practitioners were asked about any differences that they noticed when observing the language learning areas.

There appeared to be a separation between Reception and KS1 in some prominent ways:

## **1. The discrepancy in language environment in Reception compared to KS1 classrooms.**

*“Lots more environment language in the Early Years. Also lots more interactions and opportunities for language in the Early Years due to the way it is set up.”*

## **2. There was less opportunity for the language learning practices, as Year 1 and Year 2 classrooms are more formalised (due to SATs). Many of the items in the CSCOT were not expected to be present by observers.**

*“Harder with some of the areas to tick - when reflecting on this - some of the areas emphasised literacy specific areas, book area etc, but then its far more formal in year 1 and in year 2 than it would be in reception - so they wouldn't score highly on that as its not expected in the classroom - for Y1 especially, you would have seen more when they went into the corridor, as they have more specific things there.”*

# Staff feedback – Proposed changes to teachers' classrooms from CSCOT



## LLE:

- Most of the proposed changes by the practitioners were LLE ones, and were mostly for Reception classes.
- Examples included:
  - Changing the displays to be more interactive and engaging in classrooms
  - Implementing more 'communication friendly' spaces around schools and in classes
- Most of the plans did not clarify how they were going to do this.

## LLO:

- Biggest focus was to get children talking more to peers and adults.
- The changes would be made by changing the nature of some of the classroom tasks or play – but these were not explicitly detailed.

# Staff feedback – Proposed changes to teachers' classrooms from CSCOT



## LLI:

- Not many suggestions for changes.
- Training staff about different interactive techniques.
- Making time for practitioners to interact with children and using specific tasks to engage in more interactive discourse between children and adults.

## **Practitioners also proposed changes outside the CSCOT areas and items:**

- Training staff to understand age related expectations for language and communication development.
- Get staff to share good practice within teams.
- Adapt optimal language learning tasks and topics from some lesson types to other lessons.
- Use the CSCOT to evaluate lessons or subject plans.



### **From those who said they would use the CSCOT in the future:**

- 58% said that they would find a manual of best practice for CSCOT useful.
- 17% said they would find a mentoring program useful.

### **Those less favourably disposed towards the CSCOT said**

- They were using a different language monitoring system.
- They felt that they already evaluated language using peer observations.

# Conclusions

- Clear messages about the expertise and confidence of teachers related to language development – especially in identification and management
- CSCOT appears to perform as well with teachers as with specialists – although there is a questions about years 1 and 2 relative to reception
- Interest in the CSCOT measure. In some cases people have already made progress with this using other procedures
- Although the tool is for audit staff wanted to know how to use it to change practice – ie as a starting point for intervention
- We are proposing to further develop this further over the next few months working towards a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) project