

Investigating the Reliability and Acceptability of the CSCOT in the Early Years

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Background

Without oral language our mind cannot begin to grow and develop. Research suggests that differences in competency of communication within early years classrooms accounts for individual differences in language abilities later (Girolametto and Weitzman, 2002). A way of monitoring and maintaining the quality of classroom communication is needed. Dockrell et al (2012; 2015) developed the Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool (CSCOT) to systematically profile communication within the classroom. The CSCOT assesses 3 dimensions: language learning environment; opportunities and interactions. This study will investigate the reliability of this tool and its acceptability amongst classroom staff with the ultimate aim to encourage regular use in more early years classrooms to improve and optimise their communication strategies.

Aims

- To measure the inter-rater reliability of the tool amongst inexperienced users.
- To establish the intra-rater reliability of the tool, in order to assess if it is reliable over time.
- To investigate the acceptability of the CSC Observation Tool and follow up reports amongst classroom staff.

Methods

- A total of 8 classrooms (1-8) were recruited via email from 5 schools in the North East.
- Study uses a mixed methods design.
- The quantitative element uses mean proportion scores as the dependent variable to measure inter- and intra- rater reliability.
- The qualitative element used semi-structured interviews to elicit information relating to acceptability.

Inter-Rater Reliability

- Two novices simultaneously carried out the CSC Observation Tool in classrooms 1-5.
- We used Dockrell et al's (2012) methodology to calculate proportion scores from the results.

	Range	Mean
Language Learning Environment	0.74 to 1	0.91
Language Learning Opportunities	0.84 to 1	0.94
Language Learning Interactions	0.83 to 0.89	0.86

- Results revealed high levels of inter-rater reliability across all dimensions.

Intra-Rater Reliability

- Two observations were carried out by the same observer in classrooms 3, 4 and 5 on two occasions, 4 months apart. Observations were matched by day and time.

	Range	Mean
Language Learning Environment	0.53 to 0.95	0.79
Language Learning Opportunities	0.80 to 0.96	0.88
Language Learning Interactions	0.75 to 0.86	0.80

- Proportion scores revealed high levels of intra-rater reliability in all dimensions.

Acceptability

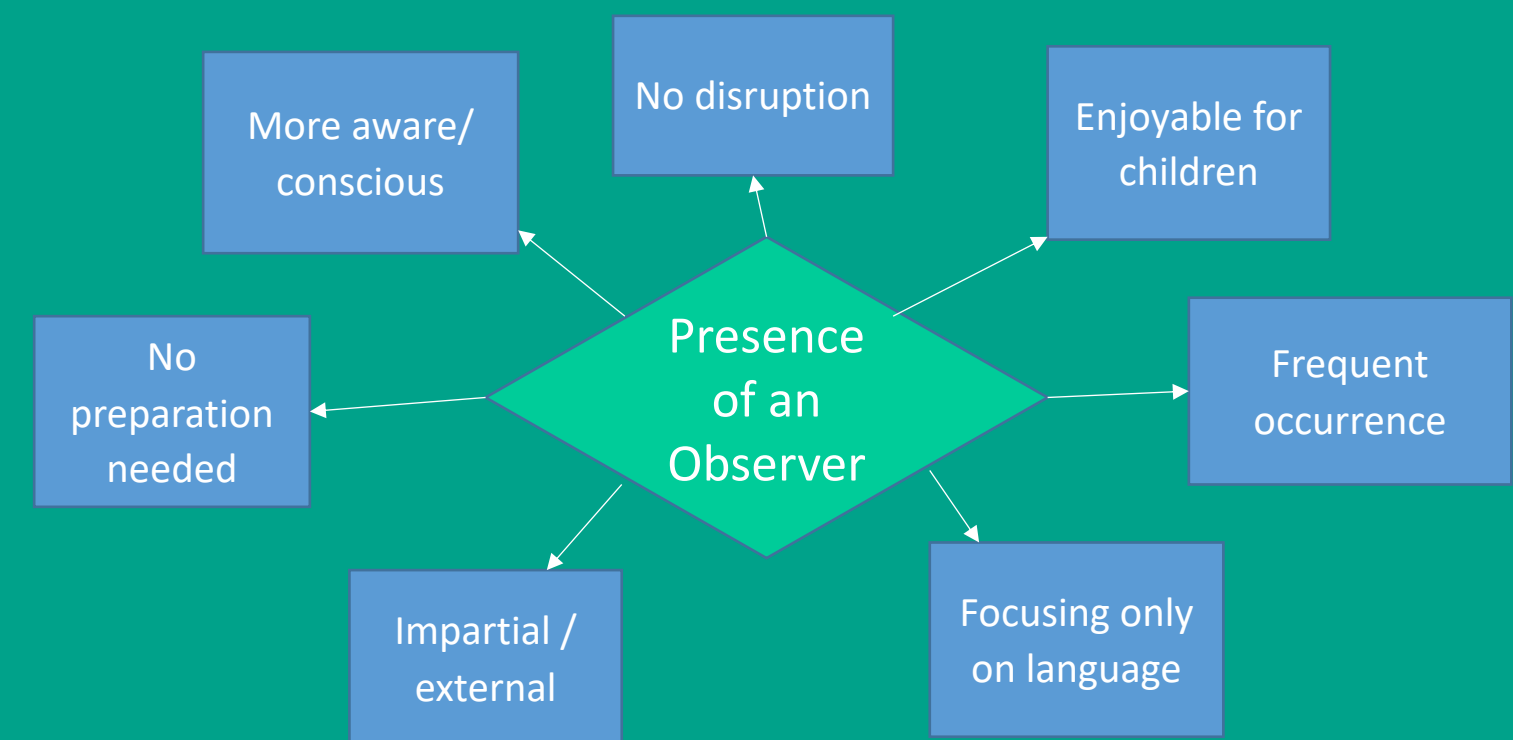


Figure 1. An example of a thematic map from acceptability interviews

A thematic analysis identified key themes:

1. *Introductions*: Teachers stated it was fine to have one main point of contact but that this should be per classroom. They suggested that less information should be provided in the initial contact email.
2. *Presence of an Observer*: Observers caused no disruption to the session, although did make the teacher more aware of their language use.
3. *Promoting Language Development*: This theme is split into subthemes:
 - *Already Doing*: None had ever used any language assessments themselves and pass on the responsibility to local authorities.
 - *Possible Changes*: Mostly only related to changing the environment.
4. *Feedback*: The format of the report was well received however some teachers stated that it would be more beneficial to only provide recommendations based specifically on the session.

Conclusions and Implications

- When compared to Dockrell's (2012) investigation, our results show even higher levels of inter-rater reliability than expert users. This has implications for future use of the tool as inexperienced users such as teachers could reliably carry out the observation themselves in order to become more aware of and improve their communication strategies.
- The high levels of intra-rater reliability could also provide a basis for future research to investigate if the CSCOT could be used as a tool to measure change over time and development in communication strategies.
- Themes discovered in the acceptability interviews can now be used as guide for future use to ensure highest possible acceptance and encourage further use of the tool.
- Teaching staff should aim to use more language based classroom tools such as this in order to optimise their practise, provide the best support for their children and demonstrate willingness to improve to external bodies such as OFSTED.

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