

# “Communication Supporting Classrooms”

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## The development of the Communication Supporting Classrooms Observation Tool

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The Early Years: from research to policy and practice

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# Who?

- Julie Dockrell,
- Ioanna Bakopoulou,
- James Law,
- Sarah Spencer,
- Geoff Lindsay.

# What were we trying to do?



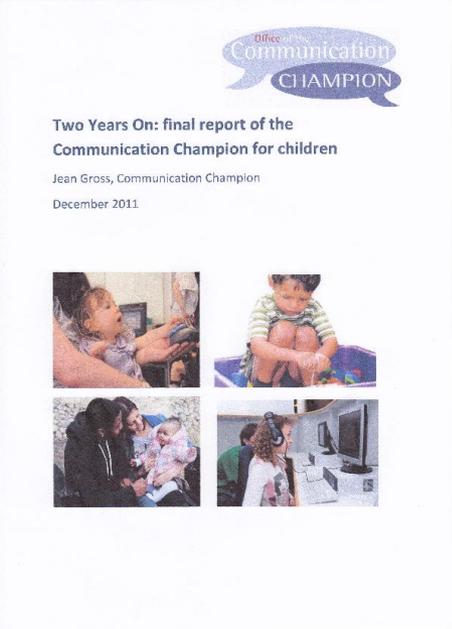
**The Bercow Report**

A Review of Services for Children and Young People (0–19) with Speech, Language and Communication Needs



**Better Communication**

An action plan to improve services for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs



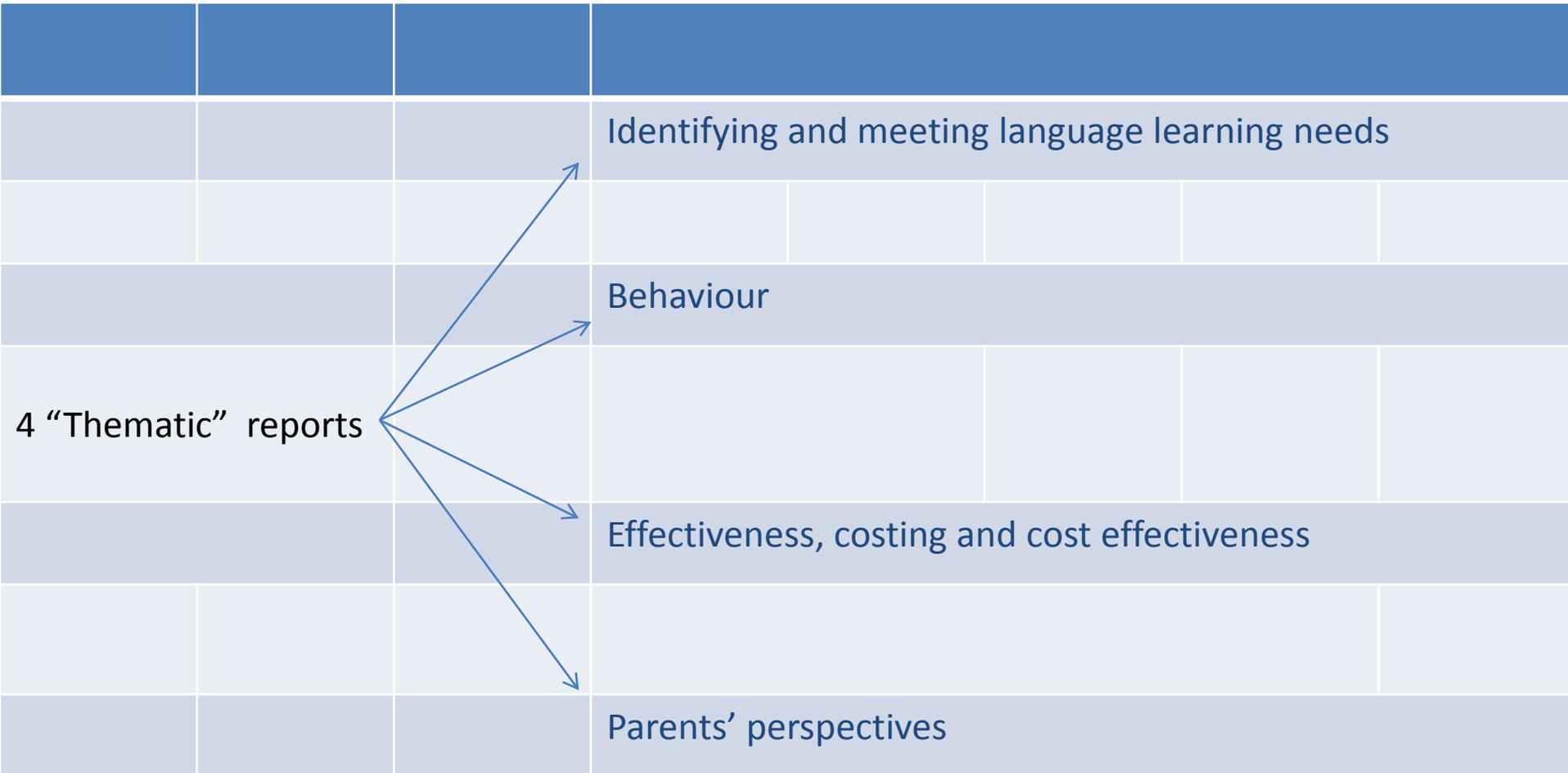
**Two Years On: final report of the Communication Champion for children**

Jean Gross, Communication Champion  
December 2011



PROJECTS		OUTPUTS
Best evidence		WW for SLCN Resource
		Survey of Professional Experience
		Language, literacy and social disadvantage
		Communicating Supporting Environments Observation Tool
		Stammering Intervention Study
National datasets		National Pupil Database Report
		SLCN, Ethnicity and EAL
Economic analysis		Cost Effectiveness
		Unit Costs
		Dosage
Prospective study		Prospective study report
Preferred outcomes		Parent and child preferred outcomes

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# Current policy/practice context in the UK

- Post Bercow – year of speech and language (2011) and work of the Communication Champion [Jean Gross];
- Critical issue about coverage of the whole population – challenge for speech and language therapists and others;
- Universal (Wave 1) /targeted (Wave 2) /specialist (Wave 3);
- Wave 1 is critical – response to intervention;
- Programmes but externally delivered;
- CsC OT was designed as a potential solution to this problem.

# Inclusion criteria for CsC OT

- The study specifically examined elements that support oral language development, including both receptive and expressive language;
- The mean age group of the participants in the study was between two and twelve years or the documentation referred to early years and primary school settings;
- The paper was an empirical study, a review of empirical studies, Government documentation, policy or documentation related to SLCN;
- Published in English language;
- Published and within the public domain after 1984

# and the rating?

62 papers was rated based on the studies' research questions and design. Studies were included if they had sufficient power (sample size) to draw reliable conclusions, appropriate designs to identify change or causality and were peer reviewed.

The criteria used for the three scale rating were:

- **STRONG:** Randomised intervention studies; quasi-experimental intervention studies measuring targeted and non-targeted variables; Population studies monitoring progress and identifying factors which predicted progress.
- **MODERATE:** Quasi-experimental intervention studies where only targeted language variables were measured; reviews of empirical studies, typically as book chapters which reviewed a minimum of 10 studies and provided details of the studies reviewed.
- **INDICATIVE:** Single studies without matched comparisons or non-targeted measures.
- **OTHER:** Government documentation or policies; SLCN frameworks; SLCN documentation; elements/items contained in a standardised rating scale derived from empirical sources and influencing current practice.

# “Communication supporting environments” tool



Made up of a scale for:-

- **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>4,6,9,10,11</sup>**

**Transition times are managed effectively, so that noise levels are not excessive and children know what to expect next.<sup>4,5,7,9,10,11</sup>**

**There is good light.<sup>4,5,6,8,12</sup>**

**The majority of learning resources and materials are labelled with pictures/words.<sup>4,5,6,7,13</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, 2,4,5,6,7,8,37</sup>**

**Musical instruments and noise makers are available.<sup>1, 2,4,5,6,7,8,37</sup>**

## LANGUAGE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Small group work facilitated by an adult takes place. <sup>16, 17, 18, 19,58</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>14,15, 17, 19, 20, 21, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29,30, 31, 32,58</sup>

Children have opportunities to engage in structured conversations with teachers and other adults. <sup>19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 33,34,58</sup>

Children have opportunities to engage in structured conversations with peers (Talking partners). <sup>35, 36,58</sup>

Attempts are made to actively include all children in small group activities. <sup>23,37,58,62</sup>

## LANGUAGE LEARNING INTERACTIONS

Adults use children's name, draw attention of children. <sup>1,38,39,40,41,44,45,46,47</sup>

Adults get down to the child's level when interacting with them. <sup>1,38,39,40,41,44,45,46,47</sup>

Natural gestures and some key word signing are used in interactions with children. <sup>39,40,41,42,43,44,45,46,47</sup>

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

Pacing: Adults use a slow pace during conversation; give children plenty of time to respond and take turns in interacting with them.<sup>1,19,21,34,39,40,41,44,45,46,47</sup>

Pausing: Adults pause expectantly and frequently during interactions with children to encourage their turn-taking and active participation.<sup>1,19,21,44,45,46,47</sup>

Confirming: Adults respond to the majority of child utterances by confirming understanding of the child's intentions. Adults do not ignore child's communicative bids. <sup>1,19,44,45,46,47,48</sup>

Imitating: Adults imitate and repeat what child says more or less exactly. <sup>1,19,44,45,46,47,48</sup>

Commenting: Adults comment on what is happening or what children are doing at that time.  
<sup>1,19,44,45,46,47,49,50, 51</sup>

Extending: Adults repeat what child says and add a small amount of syntactic or semantic information.  
<sup>1,19,44,45,46,47,48,49,50, 51</sup>

Labelling: Adults provide the labels for familiar and unfamiliar actions, objects, or abstractions (e.g. feelings).<sup>54,55,56,58,59,60</sup>

Adults encourage children to use new words in their own talking. <sup>54,55,56,58,59,60</sup>

Open questioning: Adults ask open-ended questions that extend children's thinking (what, where, when, how & why questions). <sup>1,19,44,45,46,47,52,53,57,58</sup>

Scripting: Adults provide a verbal routine to the child for representing an activity (e.g. First, you go up to the counter. Then you say 'I want milk..') and engage the child in known routines (e.g. 'Now it is time for circle time. What do we do first?'). <sup>1,19,44,45,46,47,58</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>51,54,55,56,58,59,60,61</sup>

Adults model language that the children are not producing yet.<sup>5</sup>

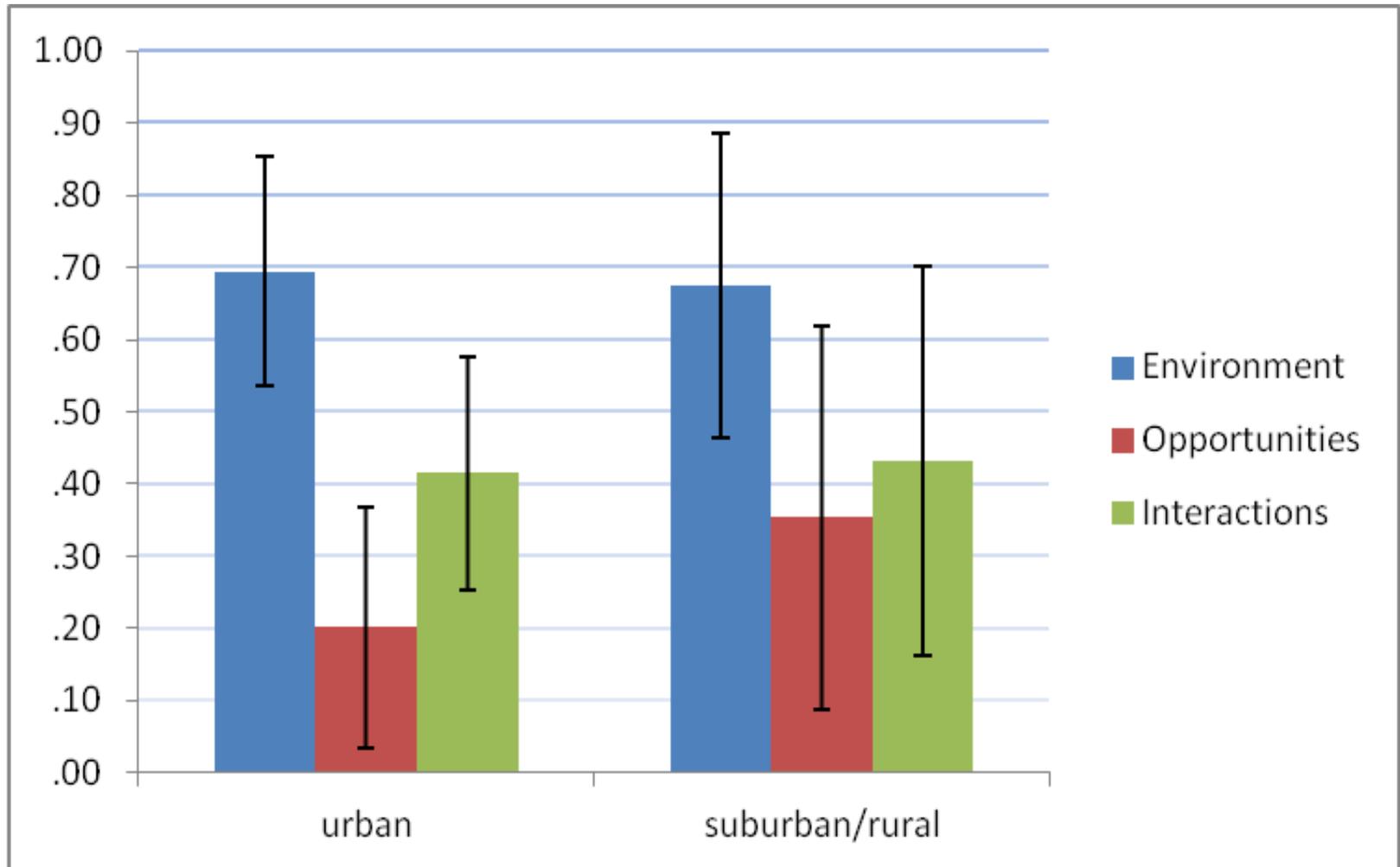
# design

- The CsC Observation Tool was piloted in 15 schools in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 classrooms;
- Data were gathered in 9 of them to establish inter-rater reliability, both per item as well as a profile of the language learning environment.
- Thirteen classroom observations were conducted by the research team in these 9 settings and revealed that inter-rater reliability for the CsC Observation Tool was consistently high for the three dimensions;
- The main study involved a feasibility study to gain a picture of language environments across a range of different primary schools in different local authorities in Reception and Key Stage 1 classes and to investigate the possible uses of the Tool;
- We also included some data from a “before and after” study;
- 101 different classrooms in 39 different schools across the North and South East of England were visited;
- The schools were drawn from 10 different local authorities and we observed lessons in 38 Reception classes, 35 Year One classes and 28 Year Two classes.

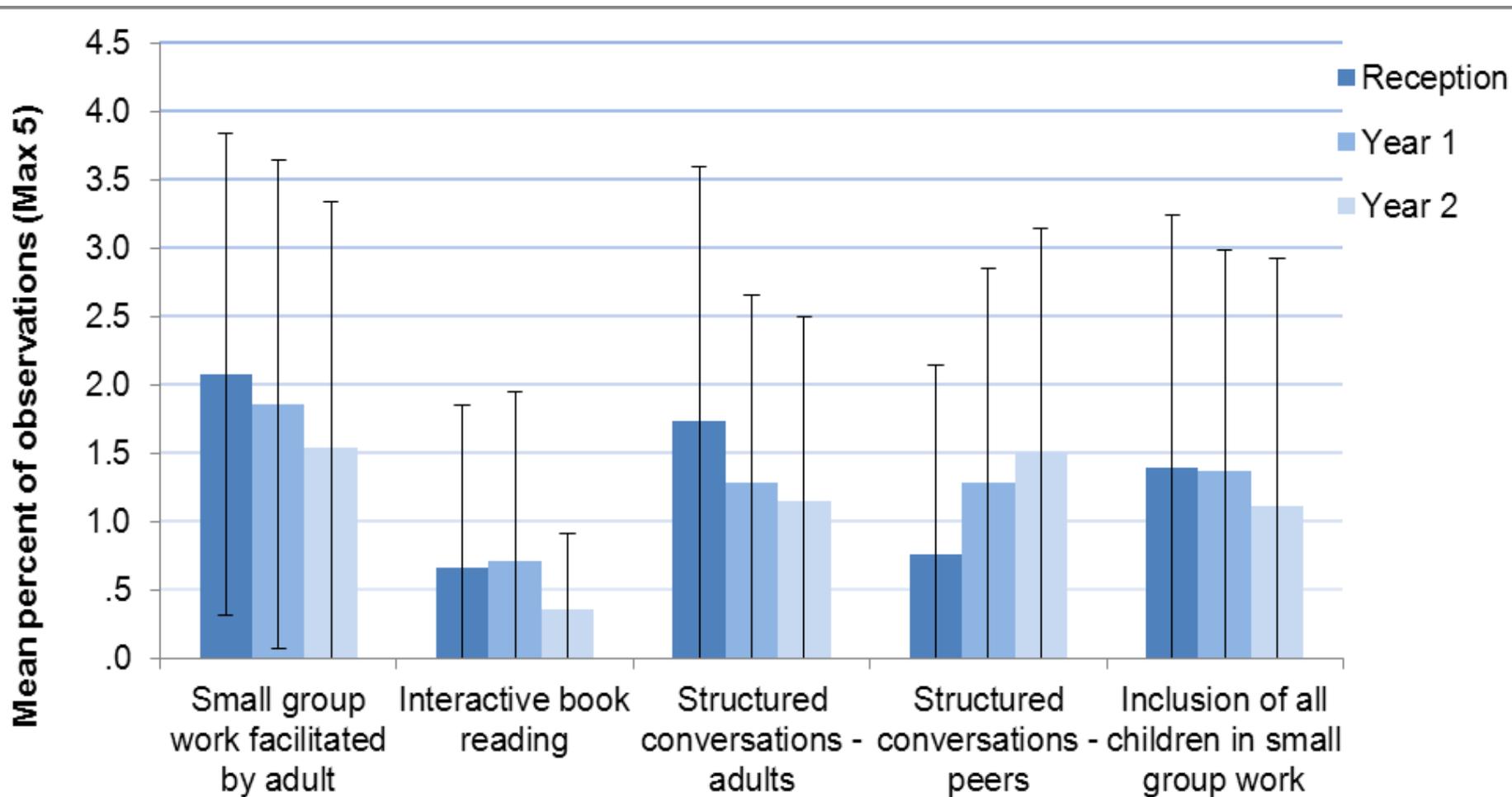
# results

- no significant differences across the three year groups for the dimensions of *Language Learning Opportunities* and *Language Learning Interactions*; BUT the *Language Learning Environment* scores differed significantly across the year groups with the Year 2 mean score being significantly lower than the mean for Reception classes;
- a statistically significant difference for *Language Learning Opportunities*, where classes in urban settings (N=70) scored lower than suburban classrooms (N=30) on this dimension;
- *Language Learning Opportunities* - small group work facilitated by adults occurred significantly more often and interactive book reading occurred significantly less often than all other language learning opportunities, with no significant difference between year groups;
- *Language Learning Interactions* – many regularly used (using children’s names, using natural gestures, confirming, imitating, using open questioning, pacing and pausing) others less so (extending, modelling, encouraging use of new words, using contrasts, supporting listening skills, encouraging turn taking, scripting, praising non-verbal communication, providing clear language choices).

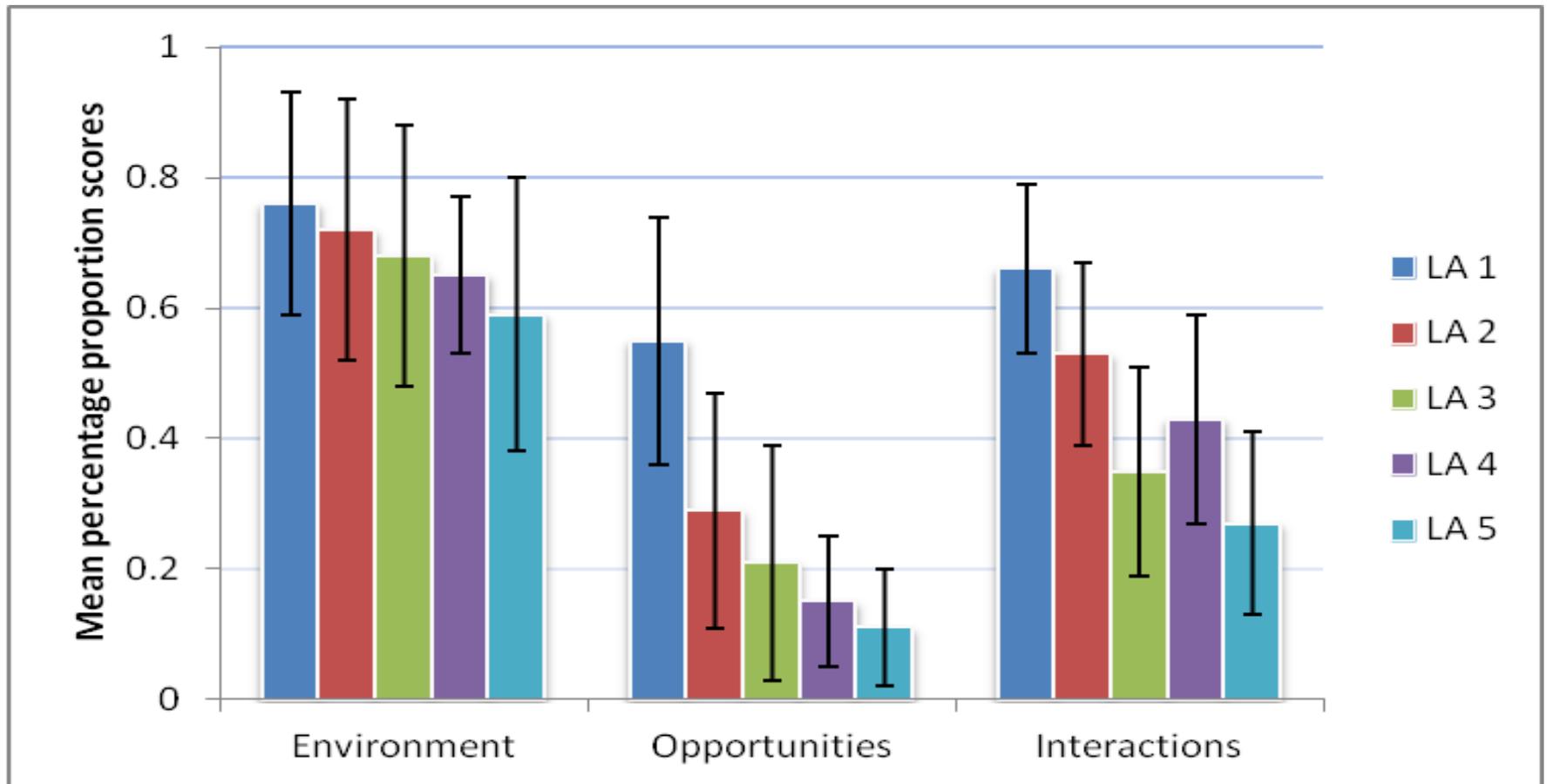
# Mean (+/- SD) Proportion Score for CsC OT Dimensions for Urban and Suburban Classrooms



# Mean (+/- SD) of Observations for Language Learning Opportunities



## Five different Local Authorities captured on the three dimensions



# Principal components analysis for Language Learning Interactions

- Factor 1: acknowledging learner needs;
  - Factor 2: developing language skills;
  - Factor 3: supporting non-verbal communication;
  - Factor 4: directing language learning, and
  - Factor 5: language-modelling responses.
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- These dimensions may provide a useful guide in interpreting the profile of language learning interactions and by indicating broader areas to focus on in considering *language learning interactions* in the classroom.

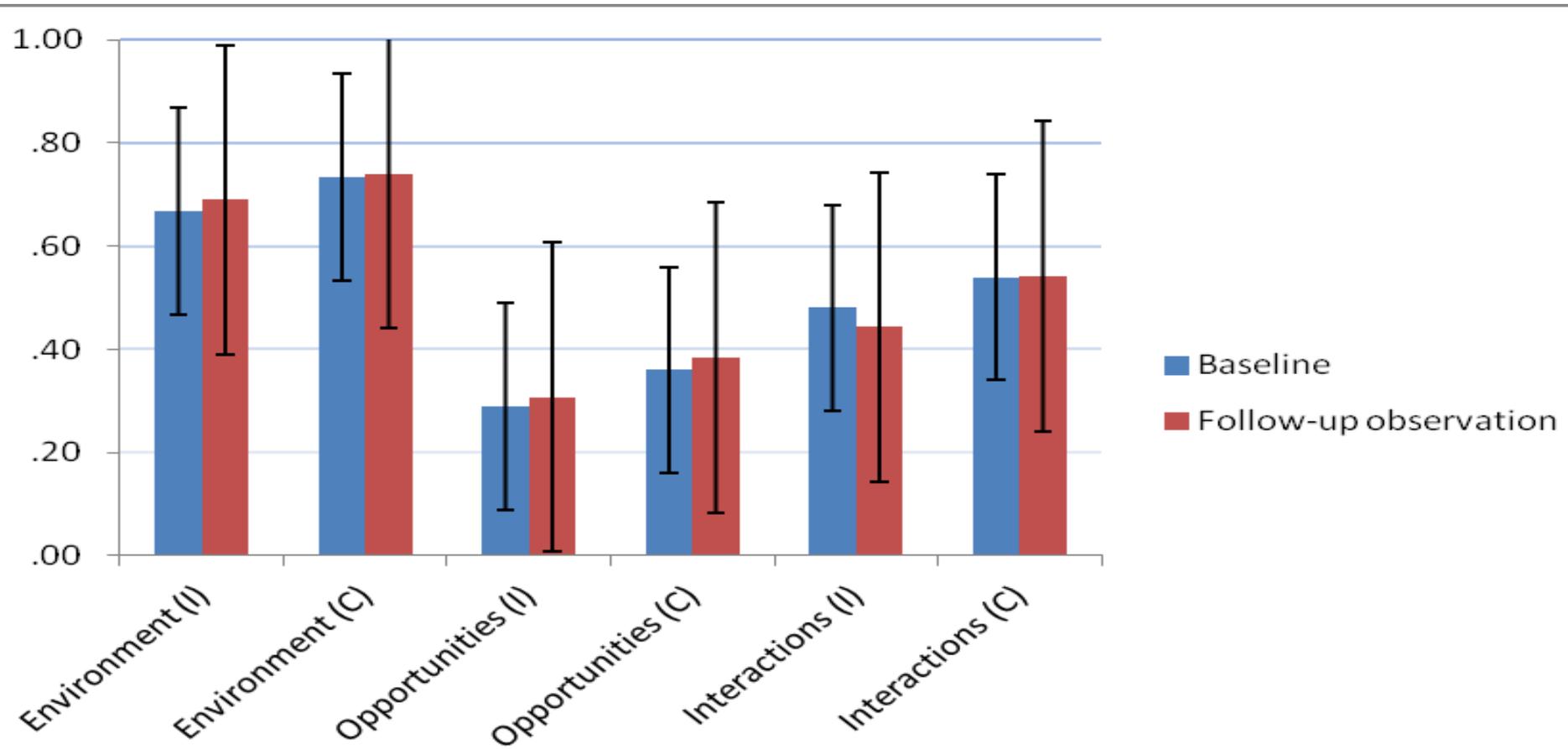
Factor	Items	Loading	Variance accounted for
1	Using children's names to draw attention	.59	21.9
	Getting down to child's level	.79	
	Using natural gestures	.61	
	Using symbols to reinforce language	.59	
	Pacing of oral language	.60	
	Pausing	.63	
	Confirming contributions	.67	
	Imitating	.75	
2	Labelling	.63	13.5
	Encouraging use of new words	.84	
	Using open ended questions	.56	
	Modelling language	.69	
3	Encouraging listening skills	.85	13.2
	Praising non-verbal communication	.78	
4	Commenting	.71	9.9
	Using clear language choices	.69	
	Encouraging turn taking	.63	
5	Scripting	.73	8.5

# An intervention outcome?



- As part of the development of the tool, we were able to complete the CsC Observation Tool before and after a short communication intervention (2-3 months) in a number of intervention and comparison classrooms;
- NB there were difficulties in implementing the training package in a timely manner in some settings and power is reduced because of the sample size (Intervention schools  $n = 28$ ; Comparison classrooms  $n = 15$ );
- But the data point to the ways in which the CsC Observation Tool could be used across settings to examine changes in the ways in which oral language is supported;
- Pre and post measures are presented for intervention and Comparison schools

# Mean (+/- SD) of proportion scores for intervention (I) classes and comparison (C) classrooms



# implications

- The study provided evidence for using the CsC Observation Tool:
  - In schools – although many such tools exist none is as “evidence based”
  - To support training – self monitoring is the key
  - To identify Local Authority In service [INSET] training – potential for authority wide audits and targeted training
  - To monitor the impact of interventions – face validity and reliability good but interventions have to match criteria and be well delivered to have a reasonable chance of success.

# The report...

- Dockrell, J. E., Bakopoulou, I., Law, J., Spencer, S. and Lindsay, G. (2012) *Developing a Communication Supporting Classrooms Observation Tool*. Sheffield: Department for Education.