

Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool: Key Stage 2

The observation checklist below is designed to be used in an observation of any key stage 2 classroom.

The average length of time necessary to collect a representative sample of behaviour is one hour. The recording of the first dimension (Language Learning Environment) can be done during break time or school assembly, though there may be some elements you will want to discuss with the class teacher.

It is recommended that the observation takes place during a regular classroom session (usually a morning session starting with the class register).

The language learning dimensions are recorded as either present or absent during the observation. For some items, there is a record of a Language Learning Opportunity being 'Present' and being 'Used during the Observation'.

For the dimensions of 'Language Learning Opportunities' and 'Language Learning Interactions', each different occurrence is recorded a number of times during the observation period. Each recorded observation is a new or different occurrence of the behaviour or activity.

This tool has been developed for the Talk of the Town project. It is based on a combination of information from the Communication Supporting Classroom tool developed by the Better Communication Research Programme. It is also based on evidence of good practice for talk for learning and thinking, based on work by Lev Vygotsky, Douglas Barnes, Robin Alexander, Neil Mercer and Lynne Dawes.

On the following pages you'll find space to mark down your observations and then examples of observable behaviours linked to the checklist.



Language Learning Environment

This dimension involves the physical environment and learning context

Dimensions		Not Seen	Observed	Comments
1	Children's work is displayed and labelled appropriately.			
2	Classroom displays include items that invite comments from children.			
3	Background noise levels are managed consistently throughout the observation, and children and adults are able to hear one another with ease.			
4	Transition times are managed effectively, so that noise levels are not excessive and children know what to expect next.			
5	There is good light.			
6	An appropriate range of books is available.			
7	Non-fiction books, books on specific topics or interests of the children are also available.			
8	Talk vocabulary is included in displays and presentation of work.			
9	Rules of dialogue for classroom talk are displayed.			
10	Active listening in children is encouraged and reinforced.			
11	Visual support is available to encourage questioning.			
12	Concept maps, such as narrative frames, mind maps, vocabulary strategies are used and present in the classroom.			
13	Visual support is used to reinforce talk.			

Language Learning Opportunities

This dimension involves structured opportunities that are present to support language development

Dimensions		Not Seen	Observed 5 times					Comments
1	Small group work facilitated by an adult takes place.							
2	Adult models how talk can support thinking in small group work.							
3	Children have opportunities to engage in interactive book reading facilitated by an adult.							
4	Children have opportunities to engage in structured conversations with teachers and other adults.							
5	Children have opportunities to engage in structured conversations with peers (e.g. talking partners).							
6	Opportunities for talk as a whole class are systematic and explicit (e.g. during carpet time).							
7	Lesson conclusions/plenary sessions are used as opportunities for children to talk and reflect on what has been learned.							
8	Everyone has an opportunity to talk.							
9	There is always plenty to talk about within lessons.							

Language Learning Interactions

This dimension involves the ways in which adults talk with children

Dimensions		Not Seen	Observed	Observed by all staff in classroom	Comments
1	Adult uses contrasts that highlight differences in words and sentences.				
2	Children's non-verbal communication is praised.				
3	There is talk about talk for learning with the children.				
4	Adult uses words such as think, discuss, elaborate, perhaps, why and if.				
5	Lessons always have a speaking and listening learning intention which is made clear to the children.				
6	Children's ideas, experiences and feelings are listened to.				
7	Children are encouraged to ask questions.				
8	Children are encouraged to support each other to elaborate or add detail to what they say.				
9	Children are encouraged to challenge one another's thinking with respect and interest.				
10	Children are taught and encouraged to become active listeners and good listening is recognised and praised.				
11	Key vocabulary is included and explained in lesson introductions.				
12	Turns are managed by shared routines rather than "bidding"; hands up is not used as the predominant means of children getting involved in whole class talk.				
13	Those who are not speaking are actively participating.				
14	Mistakes are responded to and seen as an opportunity for learning.				
15	Children are given pointers of what to listen out for, e.g. "It's important you remember X from what I am about to tell you."				

16	Children are given time to think; 10 second rule is in operation.				
17	There is an ethos of children being encouraged to say when they don't understand and to seek clarification.				
18	Difficult words and idioms are explained.				

Guidance on completing the Communication Supporting Classroom Observation Tool: Key Stage 2

Examples

Language Learning Environment		
This dimension involves the physical environment and learning context		
Dimensions		Examples
1	Children's work is displayed and labelled appropriately.	
2	Classroom displays include items that invite comments from children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays of connectives – “How many more can you think of...?” • Synonyms – “3 words that mean the same as...” • Sentence openers, e.g. “What would you put next...?”
3	Background noise levels are managed consistently throughout the observation, and children and adults are able to hear one another with ease.	
4	Transition times are managed effectively, so that noise levels are not excessive and children know what to expect next.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult warns the children of transition times; e.g. “In a minute you will go and get started on your tables.” • Children are given time to explore new equipment before work starts or given a couple of minutes to tell each other what they need to do, why and how.
5	There is good light.	
6	An appropriate range of books is available.	
7	Non-fiction books, books on specific topics or interests of the children are also available.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E.g. on the fire of London, <i>Horrible Histories</i>, science books etc.
8	Talk vocabulary is included in displays and presentation of work.	
9	Rules of dialogue for classroom talk are displayed.	
10	Active listening in children is encouraged and reinforced.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills for active listening are highlighted; being still, having good eye contact and thinking about what the speaker says are highlighted and specifically praised.
11	Visual support is available to encourage questioning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of questions and levels of questions (e.g. Blooms taxonomy) are included in displays.
12	Concept maps, such as narrative frames, mind maps, vocabulary strategies are used and present in the classroom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual support, for example, writing frames and mind maps, are used to support language and learning.
13	Visual support is used to reinforce talk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E.g. word walls, displays of sentence starters, interactive use of displays such as topic boards.

Language Learning Opportunities

This dimension involves structured opportunities that are present to support language development

Dimensions		Examples
1	Small group work facilitated by an adult takes place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children work productively together within small groups; all children are actively involved and work is collaborative across the group.• Adult facilitates and models good talk for learning within the group situation.
2	Adult models how talk can support thinking in small group work.	
3	Children have opportunities to engage in interactive book reading facilitated by an adult.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guided reading encourages children to summarise key points within a text, predict what might happen next, gather evidence about traits of characters etc.
4	Children have opportunities to engage in structured conversations with teachers and other adults.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adults encourage questioning and interaction, modelling examples of good talk.
5	Children have opportunities to engage in structured conversations with peers (e.g talking partners).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• E.g. Children discuss a topic with the child sitting next to them during carpet time and give a joint answer to the whole group.
6	Opportunities for talk as a whole class are systematic and explicit (e.g during carpet time).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children can show they are ready to listen, can contribute their own ideas and are able to ask clear questions for example during carpet time.
7	Lesson conclusions/plenary sessions are used as opportunities for children to talk and reflect on what has been learned.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children are encouraged to talk and reflect on learning during plenary sessions.
8	Everyone has an opportunity to talk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quieter children are actively encouraged to take part in discussions or acknowledged for their non verbal engagement.
9	There is always plenty to talk about within lessons.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children are engaged in meaningful discussions about the task in hand; talk is modelled and facilitated by adults.

Language Learning Interactions

This dimension involves the ways in which adults talk with children

Dimensions		Examples
1	Adult uses contrasts that highlight differences in words and sentences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlighting roots of words, prefixes and suffixes. • Explaining functions of different connectives, etc.
2	Children's non-verbal communication is praised.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening, attention, turn taking etc. are all praised specifically.
3	There is talk about talk for learning with the children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk is talked about in terms of its importance for learning, how to use questions, work in groups, talk with partners etc. • Children understand the importance of talk for their own learning.
4	Adult uses words such as think, discuss, elaborate, perhaps, why and if.	
5	Lessons always have a speaking and listening learning intention which is made clear to the children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning outcomes or learning intentions are clearly discussed with speaking and listening outcomes being clear.
6	Children's ideas, experiences and feelings are listened to.	
7	Children are encouraged to ask questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers model how children can ask why someone has a particular viewpoint.
8	Children are encouraged to support each other to elaborate or add detail to what they say.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers model how to get children to elaborate; e.g. "So you think the character is magical? What made you come to that conclusion?"
9	Children are encouraged to challenge one another's thinking with respect and interest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers model how to respectfully challenge each other's thinking; e.g. "I can see your point, though I don't really agree because..."
10	Children are taught and encouraged to become active listeners and good listening is recognised and praised.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop signals, such as 'hands up' are used by the adults to cut through classroom talk; children are positively praised for their responses. • Behaviours needed for active listening are identified and praised.
11	Key vocabulary is included and explained in lesson introductions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult explains words specific to new topics or those which are needed to understand the task; e.g. explain.
12	Turns are managed by shared routines rather than bidding; hands up is not used as the predominant means of children getting involved in whole class talk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples may be use of talking partners, asking one child to respond, then they choose the next child, ask questions to children in the order they are seated, children wear coloured stickers if they are happy to respond, lolly sticks with childrens names are used.
13	Those who are not speaking are actively participating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers comment positively on listening, waiting, non-verbal responses of children not talking, but who are actively involved in discussions or other activities.

14	Mistakes are responded to and seen as an opportunity for learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers respond positively to mistakes which are fed back to children as an opportunity to learn; praise is given for effort rather than outcome.
15	Children are given pointers of what to listen out for, e.g. "It's important you remember X from what I am about to tell you."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the beginning of a lesson or in guided reading activities for example the teacher or teaching assistant will guide the children to key elements to listen out for.
16	Children are given time to think; 10 second rule is in operation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult leaves space for responses, showing children that they are listening and telling them they have time to think.
17	There is an ethos of children being encouraged to say when they don't understand and to seek clarification.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adult helps children to have the confidence to ask when they are unsure of what to do; they may be encouraged to ask other children, other adults or the teacher.
18	Difficult words and idioms are explained.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Idioms, such as "Pull your socks up" are explained.

Talk of the Town was developed and is delivered by The Communication Trust, a coalition of nearly 50 voluntary and community organisations with expertise in speech, language and communication. Talk of the Town aims to establish a community wide approach to early identification of speech, language and communication needs and to embed a continuum of effective support, so that every child has the opportunity to communicate and achieve to the best of their ability.

To find out more about the work of The Communication Trust please go to www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk

To find out more about Talk of the Town please go to www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/talkofthetown

