

USING ACTION RESEARCH TO IMPLEMENT AN ORAL DISCOURSE APPROACH FOR TEACHING COMPOSITION WRITING

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ABSTRACT

English Composition writing requires thinking as one writes and it demands that a pupil uses written sentences to connect ideas to present a composition story in a coherent manner. Yet, English composition writing remains a challenge for many pupils and they do not enjoy it. This research study responds to this challenge by doing four things. First, it gets to the core of what a composition writing lesson should be like, by adopting an “Oral Discourse Approach” as described by Golub (1970) and Wyans (2008), to help pupils generate ideas and supply reasons to ensure that each idea flows logically. The compilation of written ideas gathered from the entire class would then enable pupils to construct their individual composition in a coherent manner. Second, it expands the work of Golub (1970) and Wyans (2008) by incorporating the use of a “Plot Graph” to help pupils order and organize their ideas. The application of “arrows and numbered boxes” in a Plot Graph helps pupils visualize how the flow of ideas forms a sequence of events leading to the climax and how it resolves, thereby showing how a composition story is developed in a step-by-step manner from start to end. Third, it uses the Dialectic Soft Systems Methodology described by Dick (2002) and Tay and Lim (2004 & 2007) to explain how the process of composition writing can be described as progressing through four dialectics. Through the Dialectic Soft Systems Methodology, the classroom-based Oral Discourse Approach can be turned into an individualised approach which a pupil can internalise and apply during examination or personal practice at home. By equipping pupils with a systemic perspective in seeing how each of the parts (which refers to the set of generated ideas, writing tips, and the notion of plot with climax can be applied to any set of picture stimulus) is needed to construct the whole (which refers to the completed piece of written composition), it can develop and empower each pupil’s rhetorical thought processes, thereby helping them improve in their composition writing. The expectation from using this structured and individualized approach is that a pupil should be able to appreciate the fact that English Composition Writing is both an opportunity and a constructive modelling process that enables him or her to gain a better insight of a domain (the given set of picture stimuli that each pupil is required to write a narrative composition about) via the process of articulating, structuring and critically evaluating his or her storylines for that domain. Fourth, it demonstrates the cycles that one goes through when embarking on an action research journey. Further, the combination of the classroom-based Oral Discourse Approach and the individualised Dialectic Soft Systems Methodology approach, offers a complete learning experience for each pupil, that is problem-focused and context-specific. Apart from improving practice (in composition writing), it also strengthens a pupil’s timeless qualities such as confidence, capacity to think systemically and realisation of his or her natural potential to learn. Finally, the

concepts and approach used in this paper can also be applied to composition writing in other languages.

Keywords: Composition Writing, Instructional Approach, Oral Discourse, Rhetorical Thought Process, Coherent Story, Systemic Approach

INTRODUCTION

With the exception of a small minority, composition writing remains a challenge for many pupils and they do not enjoy it. Besides, from the teachers' perspective, many colleagues of mine would agree that composition writing is one of the most difficult components in the English curriculum to teach. It is difficult to bring about a significant improvement in pupils' composition scores even after spending much time teaching and correcting pupils' written scripts. This current way of teaching of English composition writing seems to be an apparently ineffectual practice.

A typical composition writing lesson that is taught in a classroom would involve the teacher spending no more than two periods (or less than an hour) to discuss with the class on how a set of four pictures (also referred to as the "stimulus") are connected to form a narrative story. Thereafter, the inherent assumption is that pupils would be able to elaborate on the plot and write their composition stories independently.

However, drawing from my personal classroom experience, teachers cannot expect pupils to write intuitively. I have observed that only a small handful of pupils in my class are able to write a good composition containing well-developed ideas, whilst the majority of my pupils' composition stories tended to be under developed. There is a persistent weakness among my pupils in their idea generation and in their elaborations to construct the content. There is also a lack of logical ordering in their written sentences, which often leads to missing links (or 'gaps') and confusion in their story plot.

Triggered by this concern in my school, I decided to embark on this action research journey. As I proceeded in my action research journey, I adjusted my teaching approach by taking into account my growing understanding of an Oral Discourse Approach to teach composition writing.

FORMULATING MY RESEARCH QUESTION

The challenge faced by teachers in teaching composition writing could be due to the fact that writing is a complex process and that pupils lack the ability in coming up with a good flow of ideas to develop their composition plot in a coherent manner from beginning to ending. Many pupils begin their composition writing straight away with little thought on how their ideas should flow to build a coherent story. In fact, there is also a group of pupils who may not even have any idea as to how they should go about composing their story.

I have also observed in my classes that avid readers tend to be strong writers, while weak writers tend to show little improvement in their writing scores throughout the year. This got me thinking if explicit teaching of story construction could bring about an equivalent improvement for both the strong and weak writers.

This might raise differing responses. The American poet Theodore Roethke once commented that “A bright student can be taught to write cleanly; he can learn”. He also said that when one writes, there must be “evidence of an active mind” and the “mind must buzz around”. Given that helping one to think, is in itself a difficult task, this would suggest that it is difficult to teach the art of writing and it can only be “insinuated”. On the other hand, the Pulitzer-winning novelist and founder of the acclaimed Stanford Writing Program, Wallace Stegner, shared his thoughts during an interview in 2011. He held the view that writing can be taught, but not to everybody. He suggested that while we can tell a person what makes up a strong plot, it does not mean that one will ever figure out how to write it - talent cannot be taught, one must have that to start with.

Writing is such an essential skill in a student’s life in school and beyond. However, it was quoted in a publication by Azarfam and Kalajahi (2012) that in a study conducted by Amiran and Mann (1982), it was found that “most researchers and educators agree that, with rare exceptions, students do not and cannot write well.”

With the competing demands on the curriculum time in the classroom, teachers might not have the luxury of time to equip pupils with the relevant and necessary skills of composing, revising and editing their stories. Instead, teachers might prefer to focus their time on teaching writing for examination purpose and such “teaching strategies would include quick writes and time management skills.” Yet, in the publication entitled “Teaching Tips for Teachers and Parents” by “The Society for Reading and Literacy (2003)”, it recommended that since “Students do not have the skills to plan, edit and revise their own work, much less conduct peer conferencing. Mini lessons have to be planned for practising these skills.”

In a paper written by Margaret B Parke (1959), she stated that “Composition writing is essentially a thinking process.” This indicates that composition writing requires thinking as one writes, meaning that the writer’s thoughts are visualised by the written word. Therefore, it demands that the writer uses written sentences to connect ideas to construct his story in a coherent manner. As such, the writer must have a strong sense of logic in seeing what is missing in his plot development.

Unfortunately, in many of my pupils’ composition writing, I have observed that the context, leading from the rising action to the problem and subsequently to the climax is weak and it is often written in too few sentences. Likewise, the resolution to the problem is also written too simply. For example, in a composition story on a fire, I can expect half of my class of pupils to write the resolution in a simplified manner, such as; “... *the fire engine arrived and the firemen put out the fire...*” However, pupils should in fact break it down into several steps, explaining who rang for the fire engine and how the firemen went about putting out the fire. A well written resolution requires many more sentences

to provide the reader with a clearer picture on how the problem was resolved in incremental steps.

In wanting to respond to my pupils' weaknesses in their composition writing, I became motivated to investigate if there is any particular instructional approach that I could use in teaching composition writing, which would be effective in improving the quality of the written composition stories for the pupils in my Primary Two class. In the light of this motivation, I formulated my research topic as follow:

“To seek out an instructional approach that can engage the whole class during teaching and can stimulate pupils’ thinking to construct a composition story with a richer content and written in a coherent manner.”

LITERATURE REVIEW

In a paper written by Kathleen Cotton (1988), she cited that “writing achievement can be enhanced when young writers are allowed and encouraged to use their personal experiences as the basis of their writing. Other researchers corroborate this finding, adding that student writing skills improve when instruction follow a sequence from personal and concrete to impersonal and abstract.”

In one of the largest systematic review published in 2005/06 by the PPI Review Group for English, Department of Educational Studies, University of York, UK, to find out the effects of grammar teaching (such as, text and sentence-level grammar teaching) on the accuracy and quality of 5 to 16 year-olds’ written composition, it was concluded that “there is no high quality evidence that the teaching of grammar, whether traditional or generative/transformational, is worth the time if the aim is the improvement of the quality and/or accuracy of written composition.”

And in a subsequent research also conducted by the PPI Review Group for English, Department of Educational Studies, University of York, UK, and published in 2005/07, it found that the teaching of sentence combining, which involves teaching students ways to embed one sentence or idea into another sentence to create sentences which are more varied and interesting, is effective in developing writing skills. It was clearly concluded “that sentence combining is an effective means of improving syntactic maturity of students in English between the ages of 5 and 16.”

In a journal publication by Lester S. Golub (1971), he explained that the difficulty encountered by many writers in their writing is at the rhetorical level rather than at the grammatical level. He suggested that the teacher can help pupils write better by helping them to order their thoughts, thus attending to their rhetorical thought problems. And in an earlier study also conducted by Lester S. Golub (1970) to test the effect of oral discourse in teaching written discourse, he found that the use of oral discourse “produced more grade increases and fewer decreases in written discourse.” He suggested that “the process of teaching composition must capitalize on the influence which oral discourse has

over written discourse.” The model for teaching composition that he proposed is shown in Figure 1.

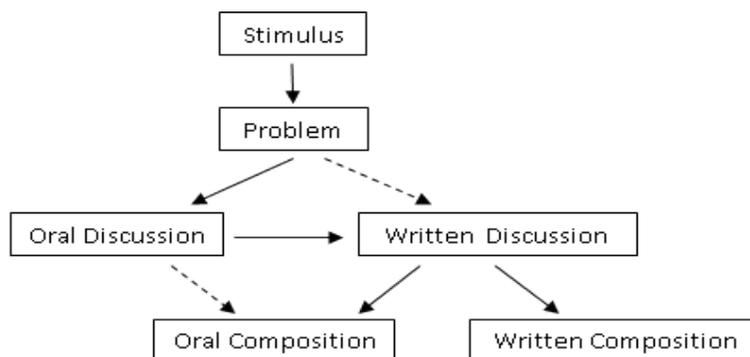


Figure 1: Oral Discourse Approach proposed by Lester S. Golub (1970)

And in an article published by Jacon Wyans (2008), he also wrote about teaching composition writing using “*The Oral Discourse Based Method*”. He explained that this method of teaching composition writing follows a schematic that would involve four major box flows, namely:

- (1) The Stimulus
- (2) The Problem
- (3) Oral Discussion
- (4) Written Discussion

In the context of this action research, the stimulus refers to the given set of pictures that pupils are required to write a narrative composition that is based on it. During the problem stage, he pointed that “teachers should give guiding questions which are sequenced in such a way that the answer will produce an organized paragraph.” And at the Oral Discussion stage, “discussion may occur as a class dialoguing with the teacher or by small group which discuss within themselves the stimulus and the problem presented by the teacher.” Finally, at the written discussion stage, “an outline of ideas on the subject provides for a deliberate list for student’s initial attempt to write” and “at this part of the model, the teacher and the pupils become concerned with the mechanics of writing and the organization of ideas and the content of the composition.” He explained that “this method of teaching composition would also force the teachers to look at the study of language as both an oral and a written activity as composition writing would follow a discussion first, write later approach.” However, he also pointed out that this approach requires a lot of time and close supervision from the teacher to make sure that the discussions are on track.

With my growing understanding of an Oral Discourse Approach for teaching composition writing, I was optimistic that this approach could benefit my class of pupils. I felt that by using carefully planned questions and through open discussion between my pupils and me and between pupils, it would help my pupils to delve deeper into their rhetorical

thought processes and that in turn will help them to enhance the richness and coherence of their composition story.

As pointed out by Dick (2000), we can apply action research in different ways, depending on the main emphasis of the intended research study. We can choose one of the following two categories.

One, "action **research**", emphasises the research component. The important aim is to build better understanding. Change may also be pursued, but is less a priority.

The second might be called "**action** research". It pursues change as its first priority. If there are research outcomes too, that is a bonus.

I decided to adopt the second category as the school term had already started and no further time should be wasted. Thus, I proceeded to conduct the Oral Discourse Approach in class.

MY INTERVENTION IN CLASS

Based on the writing performance for the graded composition that my class of pupils did at the beginning of Term 1 in year 2013, I noted that about two-third of my pupils' composition stories were either lacking in content and/or in a logical flow of ideas. The ideas presented in their composition stories could be organized in a more logical manner to minimize "gaps" and confusion to the reader.

Therefore, I found it necessary to design a class based AR to investigate if an oral discourse based approach in teaching composition writing would lead to an overall improvement in the quality of my pupils' composition stories, thus helping my pupils to achieve better scores for their composition writing tasks.

Participants

The participants were a mixed ability class of thirty Primary Two pupils of about eight years old and me, as the teacher researcher.

Setting

This class-based research was conducted over a one-year period in 2013, which consisted of four school terms. In each term, pupils did two composition-writing practices over a ten-week term and towards the end of each term, they would be assigned fifty minutes to write a composition story which was graded against a Writing Rubric (*see Appendix 1*). The stimulus for each composition-writing task consisted of a set of four connected pictures and pupils were required to write a narrative story with a minimum of one hundred words.

Instructional Process

For the first two composition practices In Term 1, I referred to the guided questions that were printed alongside the given stimulus, which was prepared for the whole level. I would discuss the questions with my pupils and as we progressed along the class discussion, pupils would jot points on their paper. Thereafter, they would begin their writing tasks individually. However, for the graded writing task that was assigned at the end of the term, there would be no discussion at all and pupils were left to write their composition stories individually within the stipulated time.

From Term 2 onwards, I started using a complete oral discourse based approach for teaching all the composition writing practices. I took about three to four days or an equivalent of about eight half-hour periods (totalling about four hours) to conduct explicit teaching and discussion of the given stimulus through oral discussion with my pupils, and it also incorporated time for pupils' individual writing in class.

For each writing assignment, I would spend about ninety minutes (about 3 periods) to discuss the given set of pictures with pupils. Pupils began by carefully studying the picture stimulus and sharing their overall impression of the events leading to the problem that is presented in the picture stimulus. Thereafter, I would take the class through a detailed oral discussion of each picture in the stimulus. During the course of the detailed whole class discussion, I would instruct pupils to jot notes on their given set of pictures. And I would lead the class discussion by posing questions systematically to direct pupils in coming up with ideas in a sequential manner to construct their composition story from beginning to ending. Some examples of the questions that I asked were:

- How are the characters in the pictures related?
- What are the changes observed in each of the four pictures?
- Is there a change in location in each picture?
- Are there any new character(s) in each picture?
- Are there clue(s) in the picture that is suggestive of a rising problem?
- What do you think happened behind the scene in each picture?
- Why did the main character move from Picture 1 to Picture 2 and so on?
- How can we describe a happening in incremental steps?

Throughout this idea generation process, the detailed oral discussion between pupils and I took centre-stage. Pupils were constantly reminded on the importance of writing about what is seen and what is unseen in the picture stimulus – to explain the transition between the four pictures, which I described as the “invisible Z”. I would also instruct pupils to draw arrows to connect all the given helping words to the related part(s) on the picture stimulus (*see Appendix 2*).

All ideas suggested by pupils were discussed aloud, then listed in phrases and numbered in sequence on the whiteboard or on an A4-size foolscap paper (*see Appendix 3* which shows a sample of the compilation of ideas generated during the oral discussion stage for a picture stimulus relating to a fire that broke out in a kitchen). During the oral discussion, each idea that was suggested would be discussed - this process of questioning

the logic of each suggested idea was intended to help pupils understand that ideas had to be generated sequentially in a “step-by-step” manner. Throughout, I would ask many probing questions so that pupils were made to exercise their critically thinking skills to explain if the ideas that they had suggested were logical, before it could be added onto the existing list of ideas that was being compiled on the whiteboard.

Through this interactive approach of oral discussion and by correspondingly recording the ideas on the whiteboard in a “step-by-step” manner, pupils began to understand that an idea that comes after must connect with the idea that was just written. By rigorously listing down the ideas sequentially to map the flow of events, it helped pupils to visualize how picture one transits to picture two and so forth. Where necessary, I also intervened by using dramatization to “act out” the flow of ideas to ensure pupils are able to visualize and check if the listed ideas were flowing logically. As a norm, the minimum number of ideas generated during the oral discussion for any given stimulus was about thirty. Pupils' individual writing would only take place after the oral discussion was completed.

To enable me to reflect and improve on the way in which I used the oral discourse approach in conducting my composition lessons, I recorded segments of it for the purpose of reviewing it for improvement. *(Note: The recorded composition lesson is based on the same picture stimulus as Appendix 2)*

Subsequently, in Term 3, instead of listing the ideas on the whiteboard, I introduced the use of a graphic organizer in the form of a Plot Graph as shown in Figure 2. And the ideas generated during the oral discussion would be recorded and organized under one of these six headings, which are found on the Plot Graph:

- (1) Opening Events
- (2) Rising Action
- (3) Problem
- (4) Climax
- (5) Falling Action
- (6) Closing Events

These six headings typically form the structure in most narrative composition stories.

This set of self-compiled “Tips on Writing” (*see Appendix 4*) was given to pupils to help them in their composition writing practices in school and at home. Essentially, the writing tips contained suggested sentence starters on:

(1) Ways to begin the First Paragraph

Eg: By beginning with a day or time / main character’s activity / speech or sound / main character’s behavior

(2) Writing Sentences for the Second and Third Paragraphs

Eg: By using time markers / adverbs / feelings and speech / replacing “said” with other words

(3) Ways to End the Writing

Eg: By ending with a personal statement / with a lesson learnt / a note of thanks or praise / a note of forgiveness / a piece of advice / ending with an action

This compilation of writing tips was intended to help pupils in two-fold. First, it helped pupils to overcome the hurdle they faced when they start on their individual writing. By having sentence starters, I observed that the underachieving pupils displayed a degree of confidence as they went about in their writing task. Second, it served to help pupils reflect on which writing tips are more suited for the current writing task and which other(s) are reserved to be explored in their subsequent writing tasks. Over the course of the year, I referred to the writing tips and I also structured mini-lessons to help pupils explore and identify a writing style that suited them.

DATA COLLECTION AND INTERPRETATION

Data Sources and Data Collection

Pupils' composition scores and the average writing score for the class (referred to as “Class E”) for the four pieces of composition writings that were graded against a rubric at the end of Term 1, Term 2, Term 3 and Term 4 are recorded in Table 1. The last five columns in Table 1 also show the comparison of pupils' composition scores between the four terms. Pupils’ names are not revealed but instead, codes were used to classify pupils as “Strong (S)”, “Average (A)” or “Weak (W)” writers.

Table 1: Pupils’ Writer Codes and Individual Composition Scores of pupils in Class E over 4 Terms

Pupils' Code in Term 1	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Pupils' Code in Term 4	Term 1 to Term 2	Term 2 to Term 3	Term 3 to Term 4	Performance in Term 1 compared to Term 4	
W1	8	10	12	11	W1	2	2	-1	improved	+3m
W2	7	11	10	11	W2	4	-1	1	improved	+4m
W3	8	10	11	10.5	W3	2	1	-0.5	improved	+2.5m
W4	10	15	14	13	A1	5	-1	-1	improved	+3m
W5	12	12	12	13.5	A2	0	0	1.5	improved	+1.5m

W6	12	13	14	13.5	A3	1	1	-0.5	improved	+1.5m
W7	7	13	13	10.5	W4	6	0	-2.5	improved	+3.5m
W8	11	14	14	10.5	W5	3	0	-3.5	drop	-1.5m
W9	11	12	14	14.5	A5	1	2	0.5	improved	+3.5m
W10	8	10	13	13	A6	2	3	0	improved	+5m
W11	11	12	11	13	A7	1	-1	2	improved	+2m
W12	12	12	15	14.5	A8	0	3	-0.5	improved	+2.5m
W13*	10	10	11	13.5	A9	0	1	2.5	improved	+3.5m
W14	8	13	13	12.5	W6	5	0	-0.5	improved	+4.5m
W15	10	12	12	13	A10	2	0	1	improved	+3m
W16	10	4	4	9.5	W7	-6	0	5.5	drop	-0.5m
Average Score for Weak Writers	9.7	11.4	12	12.7						+2.5m
A1	13	14	20	20	S1	1	6	0	improved	+7m
A2	15	17	12	18	S2	2	-5	6	improved	+3m
A3	14	18	18	20	S7	4	0	2	improved	+6m
A4*	15	14	17	17	S9	-1	3	0	improved	+2m
A5	13	13	13	14.5	A4	0	0	1.5	improved	+1.5m
A6	15	16	15	18	S10	1	-1	3	improved	+3m
A7	13	16	17	16	S13	3	1	-1	improved	+3m
Average Score for Average Writers	14	15.4	16	17.6						+3.6m
S1	19	16	17	18	S3	-3	1	1	drop	-1m
S2	16	12	18	20	S4	-4	6	2	improved	+4m
S3	16	17	16	17	S5	1	-1	1	improved	+1m
S4*	16	17	17	19	S6	1	0	2	improved	+3m
S5	17	18	18	20	S8	1	0	2	improved	+3m
S6	18	15	18	19.5	S11	-3	3	1.5	improved	+1.5m
S7	16	14	17	18	S12	-2	3	1	improved	+2m
Average Score for Strong Writers	16.9	15.6	17.3	18.8						+2m
Average Score for Class E	12.4	13.3	14.2	15.1						

Note:

The Strong, Average and Weak writers are coded as "S", "A" and "W".

* The Term 1 and Term 4 composition scripts for the writer codes indicated with an asterisk were typed verbatim and labeled as follow:

Writer Code S4* - Appendix 6A and Appendix 7A

Writer Code A4* - Appendix 6B and Appendix 7B

Writer Code W13* - Appendix 6C and Appendix 7C

Based on Class E’s writing performance for the graded composition writing at the end of Term 1, an “Average” piece of writing was given a score in the range of 13 to 15 marks out of 20 marks. As for the “Strong” writers, they were given a score of above 15 marks and for the “Weak” writers, they were given a score of below 13 marks.

For Term 1, Term 2 and Term 3, a 5-Point Rubric with descriptors in these four areas was used for grading pupils’ composition writing (*see Appendix 1*):

- (1) Relevance of Ideas (1 – 5 marks)
- (2) Organisation of Ideas (1 – 5 marks)
- (3) Sentence Construction (1 – 5 marks)
- (4) Conventions (1 – 5 marks)

For Term 4, a 10-Point Rubric with descriptors in these two areas was used for grading pupils’ composition writing (see Appendix 5):

- (1) Ideas and Organisation (1 – 10 marks)
- (2) Language (1 – 10 marks)

For Term 3 and Term 4, comparison of Class E’s writing performance vis-à-vis the other eight Primary Two classes was made possible due to a central collection of data for the purpose of analysis by teachers teaching English to the Primary Two classes. In Term 3, the data collection by the level focused on pupils’ scores in terms of “Relevance of Ideas” and this is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Pupils’ Scores for “Relevance of Ideas” in Term 3 for the Primary 2 Level

Table 5	Numbers of Pupils Scoring:					
	4 – 5 marks		3 marks		1 – 2 marks	
Class A	14	48%	14	48%	1	4%
Class B	18	60%	10	33%	2	7%
Class C	7	23%	20	67%	3	10%
Class D	12	40%	16	53%	2	7%
Class E*	17	56%	12	40%	1	4%
Class F	7	23%	19	64%	4	13%
Class G	10	33%	15	50%	5	17%
Class H	9	38%	11	46%	4	16%
Class I	3	11%	17	61%	8	28%

**Note: Class E was involved in this research.*

As for Term 4, the data collection by the level captured pupils’ overall composition scores out of a total of 20 marks and this is recorded in Table 3.

Table 3: Composition Scores out of a Total of 20 marks for the Graded Writing Piece in Term 4 for the Primary 2 Level

	Numbers of Pupils Scoring:					Total Pupils
	18 – 20 marks	15 – 17 marks	11 – 14 marks	8 – 10 marks	7 marks and below	
Class A	4	9	16	2	0	31
Class B	4	9	13	4	0	30
Class C	5	8	12	4	0	29
Class D	1	12	14	2	0	29
Class E* (% within the class)	10 (33%)	5 (17%)	14 (47%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	30
Class F	5	11	13	1	0	30
Class G	2	11	13	3	1	30
Class H	1	6	14	3	0	24
Class I	1	7	14	5	1	28
P2 Level Performance (in terms of %)	33 (12.5%)	78 (30%)	123 (47%)	25 (9.5%)	2 (1%)	261 (100%)
Class E vis-à-vis Level	30%	6%	11%	4%	0%	

*Note: Class E was involved in this research.

The graded composition writings done at the end of Term 4 by the pupils in Class E were kept for the purpose of analyzing the quality of written composition stories written by the “Strong”, “Average” and “Weak” writers. The objective was to investigate the effects of the oral discourse approach on their year-end written composition by the three different groups of writers.

In addition, the Term 1 and Term 4 composition scripts of three selected pupils from the three groups of writers (namely writer codes "S4*", "A4*" and "W13*") were typed verbatim and analysed in more details to study the effects of the oral discourse approach on the quality of the composition writings done by these three pupils. Notes gathered from analysing these six scripts are recorded in [Table 4](#) with the focus being: (1) the number of paragraphs written, (2) the number of sentences written and (3) the total word count.

Table 4: Analysis of the Graded Writing Piece in Term 1 and Term 4 for Writer Codes S4*, A4* and W13*, based on the same Picture Stimulus

	<i>“Strong Writer”</i> <i>Code: S4*</i>	<i>“Average Writer”</i> <i>Code: A4*</i>	<i>“Weak Writer”</i> <i>Code: W13*</i>
<i>Number of Paragraphs</i>			
<i>Term 1</i>	4 paragraphs	3 paragraphs	3 paragraphs
<i>Term 4</i>	7 paragraphs	4 paragraphs	5 paragraphs
<i>Number of Sentences</i>			
<i>Term 1</i>	23 sentences	20 sentences	12 sentences
<i>Term 4</i>	24 sentences	15 sentences	18 sentences
<i>Word Count</i>			
<i>Term 1</i>	242 words	192 words	154 words
<i>Term 4</i>	388 words	188 words	171 words

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Based on pupils’ responses during the composition lessons in Term 2, it was clear that by the end of Term 2, pupils were well aware that they needed to generate a minimum of about thirty ideas to enable them to write a complete composition story.

As shown in Table 1, there was a progressive improvement in the average writing scores for pupils in Class E over each of the four terms; with an increase from 12.4 marks (Term 1) to 13.3 marks (Term 2) to 14.2 marks (Term 3) and to 15.1 marks (Term 4) out of a total of 20 marks.

The results also showed that the “Strong”, “Average” and “Weak” writer groups all showed a progressive improvement in their average writing scores over each of the four terms. This indicates that the progressive improvement in the average writing scores for Class E was not due to any one particular group of writers. This set of results indicates that the oral discourse approach had a positive impact on pupils’ composition writing performance.

One interesting observation made was that when comparing the Term 1 and Term 4’s average writing scores of the three groups of writers, the “Average” writers showed the largest improvement (+3.6 mark), followed by the “Weak” writers (+2.5 marks) and lastly the “Strong” writers (+2 marks).

Also consistent with the findings by Lester S. Golub (1970), the results in Table 1 showed that the use of the oral discourse “produced more grade increases and fewer decreases in written discourse”. There were more counts of grade increases than grade decreases between each consecutive terms. This again indicates that the improvement in pupils’ writing performance over the four terms was not due to a small handful of pupils but rather it can be considered to be an across the board improvement.

As shown in Table 2, for the graded piece of composition writing in Term 3, Class E had the second highest percentage of pupils scoring within the top band (of 4–5 marks range) for “Relevance of Ideas”.

And in Term 4, as shown in Table 6, Class E recorded the highest percentage of pupils who scored within the top band (18–20 marks range) in terms of overall composition scores out of a total of 20 marks for the graded piece of composition writing. This is significant in comparison to the performance by the other Primary Two classes.

Referring to Table 1's classification of the three groups of writers in Term 1 for Class E, the “Strong” and “Average” writers made up about 23.5% each and the “Weak” writers made up 53%. However, by the end of Term 4, there was an overall upward movement of pupils in becoming better writers. The percentage of “Strong” and “Average” writers in Class E increased to 43% and 33.5% respectively. As for the percentage of “Weak” writers in Class E, it dropped by about half to 23.5%, with a number of the “Weak” writers moving up to become “Average” writers. This upward movement of pupils becoming better writers was a positive outcome.

The positive effects of the oral discourse approach was also observed when the Term 1 and Term 4 composition scripts belonging to the three selected writers from the "Strong", "Average" and "Weak" writer groups were analysed in more depth. Based on the observation that is recorded in Table 4, for the "Strong" writer code S4*, although there was only an increase of one more sentence (from 23 sentences to 24 sentences), the word count showed a significant increase of 146 words. The development of ideas was well sequenced and there was good use of connectors to combine sentences, as well as a good use of time markers to show the movement of events in the composition writing. As for the “Weak” writer code W13*, there was an increase in the number of sentences written (from 12 to 17 sentences) but the word count only showed a slight increase of 26 words. There was also limited usage of sentence combining in the pupil’s writing. However, the pupil had certainly written a more coherent composition story as compared to his Term 1’s written composition as he had scored 13.5 marks for the Term 4 composition, which was his highest composition score achieved for the year.

Referring to a publication by Ruffman (1999), he stated that “Piaget’s (1928/1976) initial studies suggested that it was not until about 7 years that children began to understand logical consistency.” Also, in a conference paper published by McKeough (1984) whereby she researched on the developmental stages in children’s narrative composition for 60 subjects (aged 4, 6, 8 and 10), she found that at the eight-year level, it was within the child’s ability to generate an event sequence which is centered around a problem. In addition to the major plot, they could also produce a sub-plot which bars a straight-forward resolution. “However, the resolution of the story solves both the problem of the major plot and that of the sub-plot.”

The data analysis discussed in the above paragraphs does lend support to using an oral discourse approach in teaching composition writing to young children. The oral discussion platform which is the essence of the oral discourse approach must possibly

have led to a positive impact on the development of pupils' thinking processes. In allowing for the teacher and pupils to discuss aloud and generate ideas in a sequential "step-by-step" manner to connect the four pictures in the given stimulus, pupils were required to exercise logic in analyzing and justifying their sequence of events. Hence, pupils' rhetorical thought problems, as pointed out by Lester S. Golub (1970) were possibly addressed in the discussion stage and that helped pupils to become more aware of missing links between their written sentences and they would fill in these missing parts as they wrote their composition stories. Thus, the resolution in their composition stories was developed more fully, resulting in a more complete composition story. In other words, through the oral discourse, it led pupils to the construction of a composition in both oral and written form.

However, based on an overall observation of the graded composition scripts written by Class E pupils in Term 4, there still appears to be a clear distinction in the length of the writing, in the number of ideas generated, in the way the ideas were arranged and in the writing styles for the three different groups of writers.

In the composition scripts written by the group of "Strong" writers, I noted that the six elements of the Plot Graph were clearly presented in their composition writings. The "Strong" writers tended to use more than four paragraphs to organize their composition story. They also wrote many more interesting ideas and they were able to write longer sentences, using varied sentence structures. For example, by using speech, good phrases and combining related ideas with suitable connectors either at the start or in the middle of the sentence. There was cohesion in the sequencing of ideas throughout their composition stories.

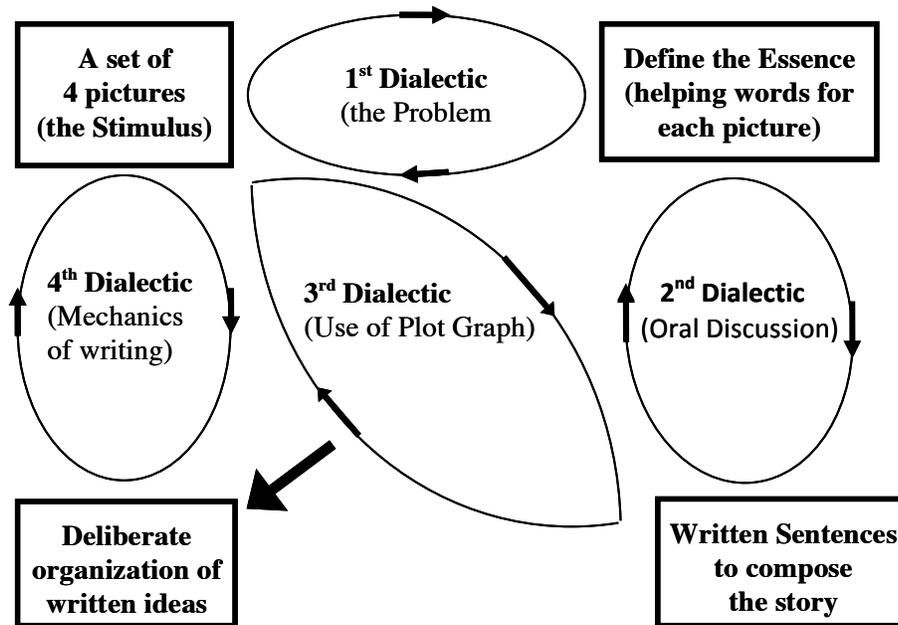
In contrast, in the composition writings by the group of "Weak" writers, the six elements of the Plot Graph were under developed but there was an improvement in the overall story sense that allowed the reader to understand the flow of activities from the start to the end. However, at certain parts, there was either a lack or no further elaboration of the idea that was written just before. In addition, this group of writers tended to write their composition stories using about three or four paragraphs. Their sentences were simpler in structure and some sentences were awkward and poorly structured. Although there were attempts made in using time markers to show movement in time, however, the use of speech was rare.

DERIVING AN INDIVIDUALISED APPROACH FOR WRITING

Despite the positive impact from using the Oral Discourse Approach in class, I noticed that some pupils still did not apply sufficient thought in their idea generation process and they did not monitor their own writing processes to compose a coherent composition story. And there was also limited use of the collection of writing tips that was given to them. This prompted me to explore the possibility of an individualized approach that these pupils can adopt alone during examinations or home practices. In the course of my research, I came across the work of Dick (2002) and Tay and Lim (2004 & 2007) and I

began to realize that my approach of teaching composition writing can be seen as progressing through four dialectics, basing on the Dialectic Soft Systems Methodology.

In the diagram below, I have attempted to map the key stages of my teaching of composition writing by using this methodology.



1st Dialectic - Between immersion (the picture stimulus) and essence (helping words for each picture), where a pupil tries to make sense of the problem situation (the picture stimulus) as fully as possible and then consider how the four pictures in the stimulus are connected to form a story. This stage helps the pupil to determine the scope of coverage for each picture.

2nd Dialectic - Between the essence and drafting of a minimum number of ideas to compose the composition story, whereby each pupil finds an ideal way to translate the helping words into a sequential listing of ideas in short phrases to form a coherent story.

3rd Dialectic - Between the written ideas and the story as illustrated in the four pictures, where the pupil thinks about improvement at the rhetoric level via the use of the Plot Graph. The outcome of this stage is the deliberate organization of ideas under the six headings found in the Plot Graph.

4th Dialectic - Between the deliberate writing of sentences and the story as illustrated in the four pictures, wherein the pupil becomes concerned with the mechanics of writing grammatically correct sentences and in applying his / her unique individual writing style.

However, as the above systemic approach was derived towards the end of Term 4, I was unable to deploy it, to monitor its effectiveness in how my pupils applied it independently. It does serve as a recommendation for future research and an expansion to the Oral Discourse Approach that I adopted in my composition lessons.

PERSONAL LEARNING AND REFLECTION

As quoted in a research paper by Kathleen Cotton (1988), she cited that “Glatthorn (1981) and a number of other researchers point out that merely spending more time writing, or writing a greater number of papers does not, in itself, increase writing skills. However, when the approach to writing instruction emphasizes process, and when the instructional techniques used are those shown to be effective, increases in amounts of writing time and practice have been shown to improve achievement.”

This serves as a reminder that as teachers, there is a need for us to continuously seek more effective teaching methods, if the ones that we currently use are ineffectual. Based on the results of this action research, it seems to indicate that an oral discourse approach in teaching composition writing was effective in improving pupils’ performance in their composition writing.

The interactive style of discussion in teaching composition through an oral discourse approach between the teacher and the class allowed pupils to clarify and better “see” the obvious and less obvious connections between the pictures shown in the stimulus. And by posing questions to direct pupils in developing the story, pupils learnt how to sequence their ideas more effectively to compose their composition story. Also with the consistent use of the Plot Graph in the second half of the year, it could possibly have helped pupils visualize the flow of events in a story, in terms of an “upwards” and “downwards” movement of ideas through the six elements that are found in most narrative stories. And by moving from an oral discussion stage to informal writing (which refers to the drafting of ideas) and finally to composing both an oral and written composition, pupils received the needed guidance to help them generate ideas and organize their writing, before they embarked on the formal writing of their composition stories individually, in paragraphs. All these stages seemed to have helped pupils to think better cognitively and to develop a richer plot in their composition stories.

Although much time was extended in conducting the oral discussion to discuss the stimulus and in listing all the ideas to compose the story from start to end, this is a necessary process in developing pupils’ critical thinking skills. Moreover, it was also observed that pupils were engaged as they did not merely listen to the ideas suggested by others, but many of them exercised their reasoning skills in thinking aloud during the course of the class discussion. With all the ideas drafted out to show how the story developed from start to end, pupils were equipped to write a more coherent and complete story.

In short, through the use of an oral discourse approach throughout the year, pupils seemed to have internalized a set of thinking skills that helped them in their final Term 4 individual composition writing task.

Having said the above and despite the improved writing performance shown in the average marks achieved by Class E over the four terms, there is still a clear distinction in the composition writing between the “Strong”, “Average” and “Weak” writer groups. This is suggestive that writing can be taught but only to a certain extent. Although sentence structure and other specific mechanics of the English language can be learnt, originality and fluency in written expression depends much on the writer’s own technique and writing style, which are acquired from exposure. And expectedly, those with a better command of the language will have a better understanding of what that is taught and be able to apply it better to produce a richer piece of composition. Sadly, I am of the view that it is difficult for “Weak” writers to acquire the same flair in writing that “Strong” writers possess. Perhaps, this may be a possible area for further research.

Separately, there might also be a need to reconsider the amount of classroom time that is allocated to teaching writing. As stated in a publication by Azarfam and Kalajahi (2012), whereby it was quoted that “Hillocks (1984) claims that the major general finding from the research on teaching writing is that student achievement is higher when the teaching approach emphasizes writing as a process rather than writing as a product.” It was also quoted that Smith (1991) believes writing is an area characterized by considerable divergence between ‘research’ and ‘practice’. He in his article claims that “much is known about which practices in teaching writing process are effective; several of these findings are in conflict with widespread practices in learning environments. For example, while most authorities of writing agree that learners write by writing, there is a distressing lack of classroom time devoted to extended periods of writing.”

The current arrangement of allowing only fifty minutes for pupils to write a graded piece of composition does not allow the needed amount of time for pupils to generate a sufficient number of ideas, to draft, to plan and to organize their ideas. Instead, pupils are “hurried” to quickly begin on the actual writing with minimal planning. As such, there may be a need to consider allocating more time for composition assessments. In essence, as reflected in this research study, we need to induce the aesthetic pleasure within each pupil in order for them to become better writers. “No mathematician or musician can be a complete mathematician or musician unless he or she is a poet.” Huntley (1970) suggested three steps to kindle the spark of aesthetic feeling into a flame that is summarize as follow:

“To induce aesthetic pleasure: Select a suitable Object; acquire the relevant education; and help yourself.”

First, if we seek to implant in the budding pupil a feeling for beauty in composition topics, then we must expose the pupil with beautiful specimens. No argument would convince a blind man of the beauty of a rainbow; he or she must see it. The picture stimulus phase and problem phase of the Oral Discourse Approach offers this first feature

by providing pupils with some preliminary education in familiarizing themselves with the selected specimens (that is, the set of four pictures) through the teacher's and pupils' sharing of common class experiences, as well as personal experiences.

Second, we need to recognize the fact that the path to real aesthetic pleasure is through toil, a principle that holds far beyond the realm of music. In other words, a limited sense of aesthetic appreciation is given via the picture stimulus phase and problem phase; the rest must be acquired through the Oral Discussion phase and Written Discussion phase of the Oral Discourse Approach. For example, the musically uneducated can easily appreciate a musical tune. But, a complete 30-Bar storyline is reserved for the musically trained; it is acquired. However, instead of "toil", it is the engaging and lively interactions offered by Oral Discourse Approach that allow pupils to acquire the relevant thinking and writing skills. As stated in a paper by Margaret B Parke (1959), "attention to the mechanics of expression at the proper time and in the proper way contribute immeasurably to the child's success in writing and to the enjoyment he encounters in the process."

Third, each pupil must be encouraged and must attempt to help himself/herself. It is this third aspect that motivates me to derive the individualized approach basing on the notion of Dialectic Soft Systems Methodology. This individualized approach enables pupils to continually apply the set of class-generated ideas, writing tips, and the notion of plot with climax, in any set of picture stimulus that they attempt at home or in school and especially during formal composition writing assessments, with a view to develop and empower each pupil's rhetorical thought processes. The appreciation of beauty is scarcely to be distinguished from the activity of creation. "In the moment of appreciation we ... re-enact the creative act, and we ourselves make the discovery again." The weak writers are able to re-discover the ideas of strong writers within this third step of Huntley's suggestion. Also quoting from a paper by Margaret B Parke (1959), "The desire to write grows with writing."

Thus, the cycle is complete. The classroom-based Oral Discourse Approach offers the first and second step of Huntley's suggestion whereas the individualized approach addresses Huntley's third suggestion. Therefore, by repeating the cycle of Huntley's suggestion over four terms of an academic year, I believed that I did manage to kindle the spark of coherent writing into a flame for each of my pupils. Moving on, I do intend to introduce the individualized approach to my pupils in the next academic year.

CONCLUSION

The findings based on quantitative data showed an improvement in my pupils' writing performance after the oral discourse approach was used in teaching composition writing. I attribute the improvement in content and coherence in my pupils' composition stories to the ideas generated during the detailed oral discussion that took place in the classroom between pupils and me. The interactive nature of the oral discourse approach allows for a

collection of ideas that are first discussed for logic, before they are listed down in a step by step manner to show how the story develops from start to end.

This oral discussion platform encourages pupils and teacher to exercise critical thinking skills to check that the flow of ideas makes good story sense, which is essential for one to compose a coherent piece of composition writing. By taking pupils through the rhetorical thought process of generating ideas to compose a composition story, pupils became more aware of what is needed of them, to write a more complete composition story. In summary, pupils received the necessary help in the logical conjoining of ideas into words and finally into sentences.

The positive results obtained in this research study suggest that the oral discourse approach is a worth venture for fellow teachers to try out in the teaching of English composition writing in their classrooms.

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Appendix 1

Primary Two Language Arts - Writing Rubrics for Term 1, Term 2 and Term 3					
Descriptors	5 (Excellent)	4 (Advanced)	3 (Proficient)	2 (Developing)	1 (Beginning)
Relevance of Ideas	The writing has rich details to elaborate on the theme and relate an interesting experience. Ideas are well-linked.	The writing has adequate details to relate an interesting experience. Ideas are well-linked.	The writing has some details to elaborate on the theme. More details are needed.	The writing lacks focus. Some details do not relate to the theme or more details are needed.	The main theme is unclear. Details are lacking, resulting in vagueness and confusion.
Organisation of Ideas	The writing is well organised. Linking words/phrases are used aptly. Effective paragraphing makes the writing easy to read.	The writing is well organised. Most of the linking words/phrases used are helpful. Good grasp of paragraphing.	The writing is fairly well organised. Attempts to use linking words/phrases. Generally good grasp of paragraphing.	The order of events has to be corrected. More linking words/phrases are needed.	The beginning, middle and ending all run together. The arrangement is unclear with minimal use of linking words/phrases.
Sentence Construction (simple/compound) & Word Choice	The sentences show variety throughout and are skilfully written, making the writing enjoyable to read. Precise and engaging vocabulary makes the story engaging.	The sentences show some variety and most are easy to read and understand. Appropriate and descriptive vocabulary creates clear and vivid pictures most of the time.	The sentences show some variety but some could flow more smoothly. Choice of vocabulary is appropriate. Stronger choice of words will create clearer pictures.	Limited use of sentence structures. Some sentences do not read smoothly. Choice of vocabulary is functional but basic.	Incomplete sentences that interrupt the flow of the writing. Limited vocabulary impairs the meaning of the writing.
Conventions (Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar)	There are very few spelling, punctuation and grammar errors in the story.	There are some spelling, punctuation and grammar errors in the story.	There are several spelling, punctuation and grammar errors in the writing.	There are many spelling, punctuation and grammar errors in the writing.	The writing has extensive spelling, punctuation and grammar errors that makes it hard to read.

Appendix 2

<p>1</p> <p>Kitchen</p> <p>Chee song</p> <p>Where did he get this from?</p> <p>Waste paper bin caught fire</p>	<p>2</p> <p>burned</p> <p>shocked</p> <p>to his horror</p> <p>burst into flames</p>
<p>matchsticks</p> <p>curious</p> <p>bored</p> <p>lighted</p>	<p>fire</p> <p>burned</p> <p>shocked</p> <p>to his horror</p> <p>burst into flames</p>
<p>3</p> <p>sought help</p> <p>How?</p> <p>- neighbour's home</p> <p>- called the Civil Defence</p> <p>terrified</p> <p>fled</p> <p>out of control</p> <p>shouted for</p>	<p>4</p> <p>meanwhile the fire engine arrived</p> <p>Fire Engine</p> <p>wailing of the siren</p> <p>extinguished</p> <p>charred</p> <p>dangerous</p>
<p>terrified</p> <p>fled</p> <p>out of control</p> <p>shouted for</p>	<p>meanwhile the fire engine arrived</p> <p>Fire Engine</p> <p>wailing of the siren</p> <p>extinguished</p> <p>charred</p> <p>dangerous</p>

Appendix 3

Eg.	• took out a few matchsticks	
	• lighted one of them.	
Step - By - step Actions (Pic 1 → Pic 2 → Pic 3)		
①	next ... lighted the candle	
②	... excited ... accidentally ... elbow knocked	
③	candle tipped over	the candle
④	wastepaper basket that was beside the	
	candle caught fire ... shocked ...	
⑤	... paper in the basket burned up quickly	
⑥	... basket burst into flames ... terrified ...	
⑦	fire got out of control	
⑧	grabbed a cloth from the kitchen stove	
⑨	flapped the cloth / tried to put out the fire	
⑩	instead, it made the fire bigger	
⑪	^{to his horror} the fire spread to the wooden kitchen table / floor mat	
⑫	fire got out of control	Kitchen cabinet /
⑬	fled from the kitchen to / the living room / neighbour's	house
⑭	"speech ... " he shouted for help	
⑮	his neighbour heard his cries for help	
⑯	ran to his neighbours house	
Picture 4		
⑰	neighbour rang ... the Civil Defence for help	
⑱	About twenty minutes later, ...	
⑲	heard the wailing of ^{the} siren coming from	
	the fire engine	

(20) fire engine arrived

(21) four firemen carried their fire extinguishers
into xxx flat

(22) About half an hour later, the fire was
put out

Ending

Helping Words + charred remains
- dangerous

Write a good ending for your story

Identify which type of ending you used.

Appendix 4

Tips on Writing – Part 1

How do you begin your First Paragraph

There are many ways to begin your Paragraph 1.

Listed below are some examples for you to consider.

1) **Begin with a day or time (commonly used by many pupils)**

- *One day / Friday afternoon / evening , XXXXXXXX*
- *It was a breezy morning / sunny day, XXXXXXXX*
- *Last weekend / During the school holidays, XXXXXX*

2) **Begin with the Character's Activity**

- *Joseph was walking home from school.*
- *Jay and his sister, Katie, were at the playground.*
- *My friend, Josh, and I were walking home.*
- *Terry's parents took him to his favourite restaurant for lunch.*

we usually
merge these
two starters

3) **Begin with the Main Character's Behaviour**

- *Peter was a greedy boy who loved to eat chips.*
- *Chee Seng was a mischievous boy who always got into trouble*
- *Being a careless boy, I often get into accidents.*
- *As the final year examinations were nearing, James stayed up late to study.*

4) **Begin with a Sound or Speech**

- *Ring!!! Recess was over.*
- *"I'm so tired!" I grumbled as my mother and I walked to the MRT station.*
- *"Grrrrr! Grrrrr!" the angry dog growled at the boys.*

Tips on Writing – Part 2

Moving on to the 2nd & 3rd Paragraphs

By having a logical flow of events, it reduces “gaps” in your story. This requires good sequencing of the events that happened. Remember that besides writing about what is seen in the 4 pictures, you must also write what you do not see – the transition between pictures is equally important!

Listed below are some suggestions that can improve your writing:

1) Use words and phrases to show movement in time

<i>Several minutes later, the XXXXXXXX</i>	<i>Within minutes, three policemen arrived.</i>
<i>Soon, the crowd dispersed. XXXXX</i>	<i>Soon, it was time to XXXXXX</i>
<i>After finishing his drink, XXXXXXXX</i>	<i>After awhile, I felt XXXXX</i>
<i>After an hour, we could smell XXXX</i>	<i>Meanwhile, Bony barked loudly as he XXXX</i>
<i>Before we left, XXXXXXXX</i>	<i>Finally, it was time to go home.</i>
<i>By then, the young boy had XXXXXX</i>	<i>By eleven o’clock, the boys returned home.</i>
<i>Just at that moment, my mother XXXX</i>	<i>At first, Benny tried to XXXXXXXXXX</i>
<i>When he reached the park, XXXXXX</i>	<i>Next, Ann and her father went XXXXXXXX</i>
<i>Suddenly, one of the boys lost his footing and fell XXXXXX</i>	
<i>Immediately, XXXXXXXX</i>	

2) Begin a Sentence with an Adverb

- *Quietly, he dragged the dining chair to where the cabinet was.*
- *Gently, Amanda and Judy walked the old man to a bench.*
- *Quickly, I dialed for an ambulance.*
- *Carefully, I poured the porridge into a bowl.*
- *Stealthily, the boys tiptoed to the rambutan tree.*

3) Begin a Sentences with a Feeling

- *To his horror, he saw three masked men crawling out the window.*
- *Realising his mistake, Benny picked up the ball and returned it to the boy.*
- *Chatting happily, my sister and I stepped into the lift.*
- *Shocked, the burglars dropped their loot and surrendered.*

4) Use of Speech to Develop the Story

- *“It’s a blackout!” my father exclaimed.*
- *“I am terribly sorry for bumping into you,” she said apologetically.*
- *“Look at the rambutans!” Bryan said to Sean.*
- *“Run faster! You slow coach!” one of the boys shouted.*
- *Joyce thought to herself, “I’m glad I didn’t keep the money and now I feel so happy for being honest.”*
- *Mr Bates shouted, “What do you think you are doing?”*

... Food for Thought ...

Did you notice that the word “said” can be replaced by better words? Yes / No
 Use the below box to list more words that can replace the word “said”?

Tips on Writing – Part 3

Ways to End your Writing

You can consider ending your writing in one of these ways:

1) End with a Personal Statement

- *Simon was glad he had done a good deed.*
- *Ben thanked the dentist and he left the clinic.*
- *They had an enjoyable time at the park.*
- *It was the most unlucky day of my life!*
- *I was glad that the horrid episode was finally over!*
- *I felt very proud of my pet dog and I rewarded him with a juicy bone.*

2) End with a Lesson Learnt

- *John learnt not to be so selfish in future.*
- *He had learnt his lesson. He would not be cruel to animals again.*
- *Sally learnt her lesson and never dared to be so boastful again.*
- *From that day onwards, John always picked up any litter that he saw.*
- *Ever since that incident, Paul never dared to let strangers into the house again!*
- *Ming was extremely regretful of what he had done.*
- *Candice never dared to watch scary movies again.*
- *Jane nodded in agreement and promised her mother that she would be more considerate in future.*

3) End with a Note of Thanks or Praise

- *Mr Lim thanked Mary for her kind-hearted and considerate act.*
- *Sue was grateful to Mrs Heng for giving her a lift home.*
- *Mother praised me for being such a caring brother.*
- *The police commended John and Ali for their alertness and courage.*

4) End with a Note of Forgiveness

- *They apologized to each other and made up.*
- *Teng Hui forgave his sister and reminded her to be more careful next time.*
- *In the end, the two brothers were made to apologise to each other.*

5) End with a Piece of Advice

- *The doctor advised Jane to rest at home for two days. Poor Jane!*
- *The firemen warned Jim that fire was dangerous and he must never play with it*

6) End with an Action

- *The man was taken to the police station and charged with robbery.*
- *I was taken to the sick bay while my classmates continued with their lesson.*
- *I was so glad that he was safe that I gave him a big hug.*
- *As punishment, we were both banned from watching kungfu fighting movies.*

Appendix 5

Primary Two
Language Arts - Mark Scheme for Composition in Term 4

Mark Range	Ideas and <u>Organisation</u> (10 marks)	Language (10 marks)
9-10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rich details to elaborate and relate an interesting experience • <u>Linking words/phrases used aptly</u> • <u>Effective paragraphing makes the story easy to read</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentences show variety throughout and are skilfully written, making the story enjoyable to read • Precise and engaging vocabulary • Hardly any errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation (4-6)
7-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate details to relate an interesting experience • <u>Most of the linking words/phrases used are helpful</u> • <u>Good grasp of paragraphing</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentences show some variety and most are easy to read and understand • Appropriate and descriptive vocabulary • Largely accurate with some errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation (7-10)
5-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some relevant details, story is of some interest • More details are needed to develop the story • <u>Attempts to use linking words/phrases</u> • <u>Generally good grasp of paragraphing</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentences show some variety but some could flow more smoothly • Appropriate vocabulary, stronger word choice will create clearer pictures • Generally accurate with several errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation (11-14)
3-4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few relevant ideas • Story is mostly undeveloped • <u>More linking words/phrases are needed</u> • <u>Order of events has to be corrected at times</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited use of sentence structures, some sentences do not read smoothly • Vocabulary is functional but basic • Many grammar, spelling and punctuation errors (15-19)
1-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideas largely irrelevant • Story is vague and confusing • <u>Minimal use of linking words/phrases</u> • <u>Very poor sequencing and paragraphing</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incomplete sentences • Very limited vocabulary • Extensive grammar, spelling and punctuation errors (>20)

Appendix 6AWriter's Code: S4
Graded Writing in Term 1

“Grrrr!” Tom’s stomach growled. It was lunch time and both Tom and his brother, John, were hungry. They discussed on where they would eat. Finally, they decided to eat at Happy Buger Restaurant.

Tom and Hohn went there immediately and quickly ordered their food and then looked for a seat. They queued up behind the canteen. When it came to their turn, the waiter served them. They stood at the counter, waiting for their food. The person at the counter served them, but they snatched their food away! As it was crowded, they had to squeeze their way through the crowd.

As they were squeezing through the crowd, John became playful and shoved and pushed Tom. It was so sudden that Tom lost grip and dropped the food tray. The food dropped down onto the floor. The food was spoilt and nobody could eat it anymore. Tom saw the fun and decided to join in. Tom and John picked up some of the food and started throwing it at each other.

As a result, the floor ended up in a big mess. The cleaner saw the mess and cleaned it up. As for what they had done, they felt everyone staring at them disapprovingly. Their faces became as red as lobsters and looked down in shame. They were embarrassed and helped the cleaner clean up the mess. said “sorry” to everyone in the restaurant. They learnt never to be so playful again.

Appendix 6BWriter's Code: A4
Graded Writing in Term 1

One day, Tom and Jerry felt hungry because their stomachs were growling. They decided to go to Tampines Mall’s restaurant for lunch. When they reached there it was crowded. The boys waited for their turn and Finally, reached the counter.

Tom and Jerry looked for their favourite food and ordered. When the owner was done making their food, the boys rudely snatched their food.

They decided that Tom would take the food. Jerry was playful. He shoved and pushed Tom. Tom was shocked and wobbeled for a while. Tom almost lost grip of the food. Tom was angry and challenged Jerry to a food fight. They took their own food and playfully sprayed ketchup on each other. Meanwhile the owner of the stall came to see why there was soo much noise. When he came out and saw the boys creating a mess, by then the owner was fuming. When the boys saw him The boys were embarrassed. They regretted and and their faces became as red as lobsters. reprimanded their actions. As a result, the boys had to clean up the mess. They promised not to be playful agin.

Appendix 6CWriter's Code: W13
Graded Writing in Term 1

Last weekend, Darius and Ernest were famishing. They started to walk to look for a restaurant to eat. When they saw a Restaurant, they walked in to the shop and went to the counter and queued up to order. While waiting for their turn, they decided who to find the table. After deciding who to find the sit. They agreed and ask Ernest to find the sit.

After the food was ready, they had carried their tray and looked for a sit. Suddenly, Darius was so playful and Darius started to shove and push Ernest and he lost his grip. Everyone gasped in horror and the cleaner was quivering with rage and ask them to help clean up the mess they have created.

Ernest and Darius clean the mess created from them. After finishing, their faces became as red as lobsters and looked down in shame. They started to apologise and Darius learnt a lesson and never to be playful again.

Appendix 7AWriter's Code: S4
Graded Writing in Term 4

“Ding-Dong!” the doorbell rang. John opened the door and was surprised to see his best friends, Mavis and Ashton and his cousins standing outside the door. “Why are you here?” asked John. Just then, his mother suddenly appeared and said to John’s visitors, “Oh, now you lot are here!” Turning around, she told John that she had invited them over for his surprise party. John was overjoyed and hugged her tightly in return for her hard work.

As soon as they came in, they gave presents to John and wished him a happy birthday. Mother started the party with cutting the cake and singing “Happy Birthday to you” to John. They all had a slice of cake to eat. After they had finished their cake, all of them said that it was the best cake that they had ever tasted.

Mother played with them for awhile, then asked the children to play amongst themselves. All of them sat in a circle and discussed on what to do. As majority wanted to play both “Blind Man’s Bluff” and “Hide and Seek”, they combined both games together and created a game called “Blind Man catch a Seek’.

The game rules were quite simple: they had to blindfold one child and that child had to seek out someone and then, catch someone. They started with Mavis being the seeker. The game went on quite smoothly during the first minutes but after playing for ten minutes or so, they began to get restless and started shoving and pushing each other.

Unfortunately, one of them pushed Mavis and as he could not see, he knocked down a table with a glass vase on it and “Crash!”, it smashed into a thousand pieces.

Then, one of the glass pieces hit one of John's cousins and left behind a deep, long cut on his knee. He was shocked and winced in pain.

Mean while, Mother heard the commotion going on and went to see what had happened. When she saw the cut, she quickly took action by taking her first aid kit and dressed the wound with antiseptic. As of this incident, Mother had to send them home early.

Nevertheless, John still was contented with his birthday party although it did not turn out the correct way it should had been. What an unlucky day!

Appendix 7B

Writer's Code: A4 Graded Writing in Term 4

"Happy Birthday!" Jim and Alice shouted as they passed their presents to Tom. Tom had invited his best friends, Alice and Jim, to his birthday party.

They decided to play many games and Tom's sister, Mary, joined in as well. Alice and Mary wanted to play hide and seek but Tom and Jim wanted to play blind mice. Alice suggested they would play blind mice first, then hide and seek. Jim blindfolded Tom just in case he peeked.

As they started the game, Jim decided to follow behind Tom. As Jim walked behind Tom he realised that Tom was about to be knocked into the sharp edge of a table and Tom could not see. Jim was shocked as Tom had cut his knee and the vase on top of the table toppled.

Mary had also seen what had happened and ran to call mother meanwhile, Tom took off the blindfold. Mary had told mother that Tom had hurt himself, Mother ran to him with a first-aid kit. Tom sobbed as mother dressed the wound. Tom learnt not to play in the house blind mice in the house anymore.

Appendix 7C

Writer's Code: W13
Graded Writing in Term 4

“Yeh, it’s my birthday” Tyler exclaimed. He had invited many friends to his birthday party. His face gloomed with excitement. Meanwhile, the doorbell rang “Ding! Dong!” Tyler ran as swift as lightning to the door. It was Joshua and Joy outside the door. Tyler also received his presents.

Soon, Tyler suggested to play many games. Tyler said “Let us play hide and seek.” His friend nodded their head. Joshua started finding a blindfolded stripe and started the game.

Suddenly, Tyler could not see and knocked into a vase. The vase move to and fro and lost its balance. Joshua was shocked to see the vase toppling down to the floor.

Mother heard the sound an ran to the living room with a first aid kit box. She saw that the blood was bleeding profusedly. Tyler was sobbing and tears whirled down from his eye. Instead of couraging him, Tyler’s mother gave him a good tougne lashing forplaying in the house

Tyler was dissappointed that the day had ended in this way.