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Investigating persuasive writing by 9–11 year olds

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Abstract

Within research into children's persuasive writing, relatively little work has been done on the writing of advertisements, how such writing develops in the primary school years and the textual features that help to secure this development. Framed within rhetoric, writing and linguistics, an exploratory study was undertaken in which a standardised task and a repeat-measures design were used to investigate the writing of an advertisement by 112 nine–ten year old pupils from two English Local Authorities, in the spring term and again a year later. The scripts were first rated for five generic constituents of writing using the standardised task guidelines. The scripts were then rated for the use of specific textual features of advertisements. All constituents, and many textual features, showed increased use across the sample as a whole, even though further analysis showed that some children who had used certain features in Year 5 had not used them in Year 6. Qualitative analysis revealed common features within attainment sub-groups in content, language use and overall effectiveness of the writing. There were indications that, if appropriately supported, experience of advertisement writing could contribute to children’s abilities in tackling other forms of persuasive writing.

Introduction

Persuasive writing has long been seen as something of a 'problem' area in writing research and this is reflected in federal and national government reviews of student/pupil attainment (e.g. Applebee and Langer 2006: Department for Education 2012). Yet investigations into persuasive writing have sometimes lacked the sustained attention and ecological validity that such a problem area may warrant: studies have often been undertaken within a single time frame and have sometimes involved rather contrived tasks that lack contextual relevance for young learners. More specifically, of the various kinds of persuasive writing that are evident in everyday life, relatively little research has been done on how children tackle advertisement writing and how such writing develops over time.

Advertisement writing offers a number of possibilities for young writers. The task is likely to have immediate, 'real life' associations. Its brevity means that the writing can be quickly completed, while also providing opportunities for creative word play and audience impact. Children's engagement with this kind of writing may also contribute to their abilities in tackling other kinds, particularly those that call upon the lexical and stylistic techniques that are central to advertisements. Features of how advertisement writing develops may indicate how schools can further support children in addressing some of the broader challenges that persuasive writing presents.

This article reports an exploratory investigation into development in persuasive writing, in the form of an advertisement for a new ice-cream dessert, by over a hundred 9–10 year-old children from five schools in two English Local Authorities. The overall aim was to characterise the way advertisement writing develops in the 9–10 age-range (see also Authors a and b).

Theoretical framework

The foundations for an initial conceptualisation of persuasive writing can be found in Kinneavy's work on rhetoric (1971, 1983; Nelson and Kinneavy 2003). According to Kinneavy, using writing to persuade others is one of the main aims of written discourse, being focused on changing the behaviour or beliefs of the audience. According to Kinneavy, the principal features of persuasive writing may also include the use of the following: emotional appeals and pseudo-logic; relatively short, 'condensed' texts; occasional use of broken layout; and the inclusion of typographical features such as capitalisation and bold. Kinneavy argues that a recognition of 'communicative power' is a defining feature of persuasive writing (see also Authors c).

Other discussions of persuasive writing have focused on aspects of text structure. Graham and Harris (2005, 95) suggest that persuasive writing often involves taking a position on a topic and defending it in writing. The quality of the writing depends in large part on the quality of the evidence offered to support a premise. Andrews, Torgerson, Low and McGuinn (2009), in suggesting that writing to persuade, argue and advise is part of the 'meta-genre of non-fiction [that includes] essays, reviews, opinion pieces, advertisements', state that these kinds of writing are all broadly concerned with 'argumentational' writing. Andrews et al. appear to assume that genres are not static entities but socially constructed and evolving text types. This assumption is indicated by the inclusion of Derewianka (1990) in a bibliography that is included in the Andrews et al. (2009) article (see also Rose, 2009). However, Andrews et al. do not make it clear that, although the use of argument often plays a central role in the pursuit of persuasive aims in writing, such aims may also be achieved through organising a text in other ways. Kinneavy demonstrates this by augmenting his theory of aims (broadly concerned with the 'why' of writing) with a theory of modes of textual organisation (broadly concerned with the 'how' of writing). These modes comprise narrative, description,

exposition and argument, although ‘classification’ is considered in lieu of ‘exposition’ (Kinneavy, Cope and Campbell 1976). How persuasion is achieved by argument, and also by other means, is further discussed by Nelson and Kinneavy (2003, 793–794).

As advertisements may be seen as a sub-genre of persuasive writing, the theoretical framework for the present article was further refined after reference to authoritative linguistic studies, including the original, ground-breaking study by Leech (1966) and subsequent work by Crystal (1995, 1998) and Cook (1992, 2008). Crystal (1995, 388) provides a helpful summary of how advertising language often involves the use of words that are vivid, concrete, positive and unreserved, as well as short catchy phrases and a memorable 'take home' message. Such phrases often make their impact through manipulating the norms of everyday language. Highly figurative expressions and strong sound effects are employed, for example, rhythm, alliteration and rhyme. Crystal also notes that, grammatically, advertising is typically conversational and elliptical. Further insights into advertising techniques may be derived from Packard (2007) who demonstrates how successful advertisement creation is based on the writer’s ability to link to the subconscious needs, yearnings and cravings of the target audience. This is achieved through a variety of means, including marketing of hidden needs, including the ‘reassurance of worth’, a ‘sense of power’ and ‘emotional security’.

Previous work on children’s persuasive writing

There is a long-standing recognition that children have relatively more difficulty with persuasive writing than with many other kinds of writing. In the USA, for instance, the recognition has been evident in the outcomes from the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Applebee, Langer and Mullis (1986) concluded many school-age children do not possess well-developed persuasive writing abilities, a conclusion repeated twenty years later

(Applebee and Langer 2006). In the UK, similar concerns expressed by the Assessment of Performance Unit (1988) were repeated by the Department for Education in 2012.

The exploratory study reported in the present article was informed by a historical review of the relevant literature on children's persuasive writing. The review sought to build an incremental summary of the particular challenges of this kind of writing compared with, for example, narrative (Burkhalter 1995; Authors a) and how these challenges may be addressed in educational provision.

Early research into children's persuasive strategies were limited to oral language. Flavell, Botkin, Fry, Wright, and Jarvis (1968), after studies of children in Grades 3, 7 and 11, report that most appeals used by children are of a high pressure/hard sell type, although these messages become relatively softer with age. However, the challenges presented by persuasive writing became evident in subsequent studies that indicated that the application of oral persuasive strategies to written ones may not be straightforward.

The wide-ranging programme of written composition research by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1982) has had sustained influence (Hayes 2009, 78). One of their most pertinent findings is that elementary school students operate from oral discourse when faced with a persuasive writing task and have not developed schemata for writing successful persuasive discourse. In a more targeted study of the oral and written persuasion strategies of fourth grade students, Erftmier (1985) provides further evidence that the persuasive strategies used in oral dialogue cannot be simply transferred to written monologues. McCann (1989) further underlines the challenges of persuasive writing by providing evidence that features of formal argument often utilised in persuasive writing may not be learned as readily from oral interchanges as is the case with narrative forms**.**

However, neither Erftmier nor McCann discuss in any detail how contextual factors (e.g. task and content) may influence writing performance. In contrast, Crowhurst (1990), in

addressing the relatively weaker student performance in persuasive writing, suggests that more might be made of children's social and educational experiences in providing opportunities for ‘contextually relevant’ writing.

Crowhurst’s suggestions were subsequently supported by several other studies that respectively delineate how such contextual relevance may be provided, particularly in relation to task and content. For instance, De Bernardi and Antolini (1996) report on the effects of the task on the texts produced by students in grades 3, 5, 7 and 11 and the positive influence of the content that is made available. Yeh (1998) draws attention to how middle school student judgments of content and organisation influence their writing of argumentative essays. More specifically, Ferretti, MacArthur and Dowdy (2000), in a study of fourth- and sixth-grade students who wrote persuasive essays about controversial topics, provide evidence of the positive effect of sub-goals. In a similar vein, Riley and Reedy (2005) report case study evidence of the benefits of pupil engagement with real-life issues, through educational visits and practical curriculum activities. Midgette, Haria and MacArthur (2008) also report on the positive effects of goals, especially those focused on content and audience. Continuing the incremental trend of the literature on persuasive writing, Midgette et al. go on to suggest that writing research may also benefit from broader textual assessments that take account of the situational demands on the writer, a suggestion later repeated by Myhill (2009).

However, although a review of the relevant literature indicates some of the main challenges of persuasive writing, and how these challenges might be addressed, there appear to have been hardly any investigations of children's writing of the advertisement sub-genre. The absence of such studies is evident in three international handbooks of writing research of recent years (MacArthur, Graham and Fitzgerald 2006; Bazerman 2008; Beard, Myhill, Riley and Nystrand 2009). One exception is Frank (1992), although her article is primarily focused on young writers' abilities to demonstrate audience awareness when evaluated by their readers. Another is Cameron and Besser (2004) who report an analysis of the writing of a radio advertisement for a new toy, although their main focus is on children learning English as an additional language. More particularly, little research has been done to investigate how children's advertisement writing develops over a specific time-scale and the textual features that are used. There is little evidence of how far the characterisations of advertisements in the work of Crystal and others, outlined above, are evident when children attempt this kind of writing.

The study reported in the present article extends previous work on the persuasive of primary/elementary school children by rigorously investigating how children tackle the sub-genre of advertisement writing. The specific contribution of the article is to report an investigation of how advertisement writing develops over a 12-month period. 'Development' is conceptualised in two complementary ways (i) gains in the scores from the use of an instrument designed and standardised for use with the primary age-range and comprising an advertisement-writing task; (ii) the inclusion of specific textual features at the two time points, as identified by the use of new rating scales. The contribution may also be seen as a part-response to the editors' suggestions in the Handbook of Writing Development – that more needs to be done on what constitutes development in writing and to conceptualise what it looks like (Beard et al. 2009, 3).

The principal research questions in the present study were as follows:

1. What attainment differences are there in children's advertisement writing between Year 5 and Year 6?
2. What features are found in Year 5 (9–10 year olds) advertisement writing?
3. How does the profile of features change when the same writing task is undertaken a year later?
4. What kinds of features characterise the writing of the children judged to have the highest and lowest attainment?
5. What kinds of features characterise the writing of the children judged to have made the greatest gains in attainment?

Methods

Design

The conceptual framework for the study accepts the long-standing view that there is a continuous interaction in primary education between development, experience and curriculum in children's learning (e.g. Blyth 1984; Pollard 2002). There is thus a tacit acknowledgment in the study that (i) development can take place without education (although formal education cannot take place without the adoption of some stance towards development); (ii) curriculum is both a part of experience and a means of extending experience and (iii) learning and subsequent development in writing can be a product of both formal education (curricular experience) and as something outside education (general experience).

Furthermore, in investigating how children's advertisement writing develops over a particular time-scale, the empirical framework for the study accepts the need for contextual relevance in this kind of writing: the main research instrument was designed and standardised

for the primary school age range. It also follows that children's attempts at advertisement writing may draw upon their experiences of a range of modalities, for instance the oral 'language play' of rhymes, jingles and alliteration (Crystal 1998) and the images that pervade popular culture (Marsh 2009; Cook 2008), even though such experiences vary greatly in nature and extent (Moore and Lutz 2000; see also Marshall and Sensoy 2011).

The use of a repeat-measures design in an investigation of this kind is in keeping with an authoritative source on applied linguistics research who argues that there has been relatively little longitudinal research in applied linguistics and that there is a 'strong case' for more work of this kind; it appears to be one of the most promising research directions for applied linguistics to take (Dörnyei 2007, 78). This promise may be further increased if longitudinal designs are combined with qualitative analysis of some of the 'dynamic change patterns' (Dörnyei 2007, 88).

Participants

The participants were all the Year 5 pupils (60 boys; 52 girls) from five schools in two English Local Authorities. The schools were from a range of socio-economic catchments, although funding constraints prevented inter-school comparisons of the children's writing. Two were inner-city schools, in relatively poor areas; one was a large suburban school with a mix of private and local-authority housing; two were in relatively prosperous villages. The schools were identified through the initial teacher training networks of the university where the study was undertaken. The web-site of the central government Office for Standards in Education (https://www.gov.uk/find-ofsted-inspection-report) was consulted to ensure that their pupil attainment reflected an appropriate range when the schools were last inspected. Compared with 'all schools', one of the schools was rated as 'well above average' in its standards achieved in English: three as 'average' and one as 'below average'.

At the time of the investigation, the five schools all followed the statutory national curriculum and the same non-statutory guidance, including the use of shared and guided teaching. For the period between the two time-points of the investigation there was no mention in the guidance material of the use of description to persuade others of a point of view. Instead the termly guidance on written composition during this twelve-month period included systematic note-making, non-chronological reports, explanations, commentaries, autobiographical writing and argument to persuade others of a point of view (although the latter could be in note form to support an oral presentation), all being linked to 'text-level' work in the reading of fiction, poetry and non-fiction. The guidance for this age-range in the previous summer term had included the design of an advertisement for a school event or an imaginary product but there was no additional guidance on advertisement writing between the two times when the data for this study were collected.

Procedure

A writing task (entitled 'The Toffee Tower') from the National Foundation for Educational Research Literacy Impact Test B (Twist and Brill, 2000) was administered to 112 Year 5 children near the end of the spring term and again to the same children one year later. The task is described by the test authors as 'persuasive description'. This conceptualisation is consistent with Kinneavy's framing of the aims and modes of discourse, discussed above. The task also reflected the constructs of attainment and progression within the English national schooling system at the time of the study. The task had demonstrable content and concurrent validity (Twist and Brill 2000, 64), its structure being informed by analyses of national curriculum test scripts in England (Twist and Brill 2000, v). The age-appropriate test comprises a 10-minute task, using content that is likely to appeal equally to boys and girls: an advertisement for a new dessert. Although the task does not assume the creation of images,

the test booklet does have an illustration of the new dessert that could be used for subsequent discussion with pupils of the respective roles of text and image in persuasive discourse of this kind. The task is supported by an introduction, read aloud to the participating children, and a marking guide. The reliability of the Literacy Impact Writing Test B (Cronbach's Alpha), is reported as 0.87, considered to be suitably high for tests of this length and nature (Twist and Brill 2000, 63–65).

The scripts were rated in two ways, with two different rating panels being used. None of the panel members came from the sample schools. In order to answer the first research question (concerning attainment differences between Year 5 and Year 6 advertisement writing), one rating panel applied the numeric scheme from the *Literacy Impact Teacher's* Guide to the five constituents of writing included in Literacy Impact Test B. The constituents are as follows: purpose and organisation (0, 2, 4 or 6 marks); grammar, vocabulary and style (0, 2, 4 or 6 marks); punctuation; spelling; and handwriting (0, 1, 2 or 3 marks each). Ratings for grammar, vocabulary and style; punctuation; spelling and handwriting are made across the writing from the persuasive description task and from the other Literacy Impact task, which involves an 'imaginative narrative'. The criteria for assessing attainment in the purpose and organisation of persuasive description are shown in Table 1. Further details of all the rating schemes, and worked examples, may be found in Twist and Brill (2000). The first rating panel comprised primary school teachers with national test marking experience who were trained in standardisation meetings led by a technical representative of the publishers, NFER-Nelson. Each member of the marking panel was responsible for all the scripts from a particular school.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

In order to answer the next two research questions (concerning features found in Year 5 advertisement writing and how the profile of features changed a year later), broader textual assessments were made, in line with the suggestions of Midgette et al. (2008) and Myhill (2009), as discussed above. These broader assessments involved the used new rating scales derived from relevant studies of elementary/primary school writing, national curriculum documentation and the work of linguists who have specifically addressed persuasive techniques that might be used in advertisement writing (Leech 1966; Crystal 1995; Wyatt-Smith 1997; Crystal 1998; DfEE 2000; Author; DfES 2002; QCA 2004; Cameron and Besser 2004; see also Authors a). The work of Cameron and Besser was of particular relevance to the present study, although its focus was different, a twelve-cell rating scale being used, comprising four 'stages' ('attracting attention', 'the information', 'the slogan' and 'the small print') and three genre elements ('format', 'style' and 'voice').

As can be seen in the Appendix, the scales in the present study provided for the use of the following textual features: 'Attention to task purpose'; 'Features used to write in a style appropriate to audience and purpose'; 'Features used to select and sequence information in the format of persuasive writing'; 'Features used to construct paragraphs, use a variety of sentences and link ideas'; and 'Features used to choose words which enhance the writing'. Details of the features addressed in the scales are shown in Tables 4–7. In line with a basic principle of feature analysis, the scales were mostly dichotomous and examined whether a feature was present or not. For many of these features this involved a measure of effectiveness, as indicated in the wording used on the rating instrument/sheet. For example, for Feature 29, raters were required to judge whether a paragraph had been well organised.

The second rating panel comprised teacher educators with extensive national test marking experience and with the additional capacity to commit to work that was necessary to develop and refine the rating scales. To help improve inter-rater reliability, and to refine the

scales if appropriate, an approach was used similar to the one used by Cameron and Besser (2004), with moderation trials being undertaken on sets of 10 randomly selected scripts. After each trial, discrepancies were noted and discussed with each panel. Reliability across raters was calculated for each feature within the main categories of the scale by dividing the number of agreements by the number of ratings.

After the completion of the moderation trials, the levels of reliability in the final, main assessment were also checked; each rater received the same three, randomly selected, scripts as part of their final set of (Year 5 and Year 6) scripts, without knowing which of the scripts were being used for reliability purposes. For the textual features of the persuasive task, the average agreement across all categories was 0.86, which is slightly higher than that reported by Cameron and Besser (2004). The lowest agreement was 0.66, which was for 'Explanation of its [the product's] appeal to the audience' and the features concerned with the use of paragraphing, sentence types and coherence. Script anonymisation during rating and coding was achieved by the removal of the cover sheets from the Literacy Impact booklets and the addition of specially coded identifier labels.

In order to answer the fourth and fifth research questions (concerning features that characterise the writing of the highest and lowest attaining children and those judged to have made the greatest gains in attainment over the 12-month period), sub-samples of scripts were selected. The scripts were those rated highest and lowest in Year 6 (13 and 12 pupils, respectively) and that showed the greatest gains between Year 5 and Year 6 (also 13), according to the Literacy Impact scores.

User participation

A half-day briefing meeting was held with the class teachers from the participating schools just before the study began. Class teachers were consulted again at the end of the quantitative

analysis so that they could comment on the findings from their school and also on a summary of the results as a whole. The teachers all reported following the administrative guidance provided by the project team. They did not report any misgivings about the task, other than that planning time might have been explicitly included. Given the circumstances of the test administration, it is also very unlikely that the teachers provided any specific preparation or support for the writing tasks: the test articles were despatched to schools, completed and returned within a few days. (As will be indicated in the results section below, there was no recurring use of phrases or paragraph openings in the children's writing that might signify shared rehearsal.) All aspects of the research design were in accordance with the extant ethical guidelines of the funding body and also those of the British Educational Research Association (see https://www.bera.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/BERA-Ethical-Guidelines-2011.pdf).

Analysis

Quantitative analysis

In answering the first research question, comparisons were made between the aggregate Year 5 and Year 6 Literacy Impact raw scores. As the study comprised a repeat-measure design, the paired sample t-test was used. Comparisons were also made of the Year 5 and Year 6 scores for the five constituents of writing using a non-parametric test, the Wilcoxon signed rank test, as these sub-scores were ordinal.

In answering the second and third research questions, analysis of the dichotomous scales data was undertaken as follows: (i) calculation of the percentages of the pupil sample whose Year 5 and Year 6 texts included each of the textual features in the rating scales; (ii) comparison of the proportions of the total sample using each feature. As repeat-measure dichotomous data were being analysed, the McNemar test was used, which is appropriate for

nominal data in 2 x 2 contingency tables of this kind. It is recognised that the risk of 'Type 1 errors', i.e. finding statistically significant differences where there are none, is inflated when carrying out multiple statistical tests. Hence it is suggested that the p-values reported below be regarded as indicative only and that the focus in judging the findings should be on the actual size of differences observed.

In order to investigate the numbers of pupils whose writing included a feature in Year 5 but not in Year 6 and vice versa, a visual check was also made of all the Year 5–Year 6 2x2 contingency tables (not included because of space limitations) of the proportions of the total sample using each feature.

Qualitative analysis

In answering the fourth and fifth research questions, pro formas were developed, trialled and refined in order to summarise and document textual features of content, language use and overall effectiveness of the writing done by the pupil sub-groups (see Tables 8–10).

Results

Quantitative data

Summary statistics for Year 5 and Year 6 Literacy Impact tests are shown in Table 2. There was a highly significant difference between the scores ($t=5.863$, $df=110$, $p<0.001$).

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Similarly, Table 3 shows that, across the sample as a whole, there was an improvement in all categories, with the differences (in mean ranks) all being significant at the 5% level or less.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Of the 110 pupils in the sample who completed the Literacy Impact test in both years, 71 (64.5%) showed an improvement in their score in Year 6, 23 (20.9%) achieved a lower score and 16 (14.5%) showed no change.

Of the 13 highest-attaining children in the Year 6 administration of the task, with raw scores of 21 or above (including ratings for grammar, vocabulary and style, punctuation, spelling and handwriting across both Literacy Impact writing tasks), the texts of 10 had also been rated among the highest 13 in Year 5, with scores of 15 or above. The other three children were part of the high gains sub-group, discussed below.

Of the 12 children with the lowest raw scores for persuasive description writing in Year 6 with scores of 10 or below, the texts of all 12 were also the lowest 12 in Year 5, with scores of nine or below. The mean gain between Year 5 and Year 6 of children who scored lowest was only 0.9.

Comparisons of the proportions of the total sample using each textual feature are shown in Tables 4–7. In each of these Tables, the textual features are listed in the order of % differences (largest to smallest) between Year 5 and Year 6.

[Insert Tables 4–7 about here]

There was a relatively high use (>60%) in Year 5 but also a significant Year 5–Year 6 increase in 'Attention to task purpose' ($p < 0.05$); 'Advertisement form is maintained' ($p < 0.05$); 'Use of precise information' ($p < 0.05$); and 'Use of noun phrases' ($p < 0.05$). There was a moderately high use (c.30–60%) in Year 5 but also a significant Year 5–Year 6

increase in the ‘Inclusion of a series of persuasive points’ and the ‘Development of persuasive points’ (both $p < 0.01$); and in ‘Use of verb phrases’ ($p < 0.05$). There was a relatively low use in Year 5 (< 30%) but also a significant Year 5–Year 6 increase in ‘Use of bold type and/or capital letters to add emphasis’ ($p < 0.05$); and ‘Snappy summary of the information given’ ($p < 0.05$). Features whose increases might have reached significance had the sample been larger (i.e. having p-values close to, but above, 0.05) included: ‘Description of dessert's features’; ‘Memorable ('take home') message’; ‘Effective use of a variety of sentence types’ and ‘Use of word play’.

A visual check of the cross-tabular Year 5–Year 6 comparisons of the proportions of pupils using each feature revealed that, in relation to the above findings, a substantial proportion of texts (approximately a tenth or more) that had included a feature in Year 5 did not include it in Year 6. This added an ‘ebb and flow’ quality to the respective developmental profiles. This finding was evident in the following features with significant increases, the proportion of pupils who included the feature in their Year 5 texts, but not in Year 6, being shown as a decimal fraction: ‘Attention to task purpose’ (0.10); ‘Advertisement form is maintained’ (0.19) ‘Development of persuasive points’ (0.26); ‘Use of verb phrases’ (0.35); ‘Use of bold type and/or capital letters to add emphasis’ (0.31) and ‘Snappy summary of the information given’ (0.60). The ‘ebb and flow’ quality was also evident in the following features whose increases might have reached significance with a larger sample: ‘Memorable (‘take home’) message’ (0.31); ‘Effective use of a variety of sentence types’ (0.35); and ‘Use of word play’ (0.52).

Qualitative data

Characteristics of the high attainment sub-group.

Table 8 summarises the textual features that characterised high attainment.

[Insert Table 8 about here]

Rhona was an example of a young writer who maintained a clear organisational structure in both her Year 5 and her Year 6 texts. (Pseudonyms are used throughout the article and the children's original spelling and punctuation have been retained.) Exceptionally within the sub-samples, both texts began identically: 'The Toffee Tower is a delicious new dessert'. Her Year 5 text was then extended into a superlative: 'Full of sticky toffee and scrumptious ice-cream, this is our best dessert yet'. Her Year 6 text was extended differently, through a description of ingredients that was likely to add to the consumer appeal: 'The ice-cream is trickling with toffee and also has a cherry on top. There is a crunchy wafer and 2 chocolate wafers, all covered in toffee'. Her consistent persuasive appeal was maintained by features like 'Our gorgeus dessert will definitely cool you down on those scorching hot days' (Year 5) and 'You must hurry, though ... we have a limited amount' (Year 6). Both texts ended with a clear appeal to the reader: a parenthetical reminder, '(Only on sale at Treats cafe)' (Year 5); and a direct interrogative, 'Are you going to buy it?' (Year 6).

Frequent use of underlining, capitals, brackets and exclamations for effect by other children in the high attainers group included 'ask for a TOFFEE TOWER!' (Susan, Year 6); 'TOFEE TOWER! AT THE TREATS CAFE TODAY!' (Theo, Year 6) and 'Get yours NOW!' (Mary, Year 6). Examples of key information on ingredients included 'It has two cadbury [chocolate] *flakes in, all types of different sauces…little crunchy blobs and some nice* big golden toffee' (Bryony, Year 6). Instances of persuasive vocabulary included: 'the newest, amazing, flavourful ice-cream' (also Bryony, Year 6); alliterative word play 'a tounge tempting, terrific toffee tower!' (Elizabeth, Year 6) and the use of advertisement-style hyperbole '[the] most creamiest, tastiest most enjoyable ice-cream ever made' (Lee, Year 6).

Characteristics of the low attainment sub-group

Table 9 summarises the textual features that characterised low attainment.

[Insert Table 9 about here]

Sharon was one of the sub-group whose overall attainment remained relatively low. She produced 64 words in Year 5 and only 34 in Year 6. The ratings for her punctuation and spelling received the lowest rating in both years and a zero score for handwriting on both occasions, as it remained a print script with no discernible letter joins. In neither text did she make convincing use of the organisational features of persuasive genre, tending instead to adopt a rather idiosyncratic style: 'I want people to buy My toffee tower becuse it is so interesting and Lovely and beatuful' (Year 5); 'The toffee tower has got in it cherrys flakes icecream. And I want to atracctart People' (Year 6). Her style was not particularly persuasive on either occasion: 'A costomer might want to buy it cos I i bet they think it smells good. tates [tastes] good (Year 5); it make you want to eat it' (Year 6).

There were hardly any direct appeals and her writing was repetitive in places: 'And it as got nice icecream ....Its icecream' (Year 5). Sharon did not use underlining, capitals, brackets or exclamations for effect in either Year 5 or in Year 6. She did place some emphasis with the dessert's ingredients: 'The toffe tower as [has] got cherry, flakes and nice wafer' (Year 5) and used a little word play: 'it is delisous and yummy .....it is so scrummy' (Year 6) but in both texts omitted some key information, such as price and availability. There was no information on value for money or customer satisfaction and, although there was some use of expanded description in Year 5, '*Plus it is big And whit'e*', there was little expansion in the Year 6 text.

Characteristics of the high gains sub-group.

Table 10 summarises the textual features that characterised the writing in the high gains sub-group. All five schools were represented in this sub-group.

[Insert Table 10 about here]

One of the most striking developments was apparent in the writing by Helen, whose Year 6 writing exhibited substantially more features of persuasive writing, particularly in organisational structure. In Year 5, Helen only wrote 37 words; in Year 6 she wrote 71. Her Year 5 text started with a direct appeal to the reader, 'Why not try our delicious new toffee tower'. However, after some detailed description of the ingredients, 'A wonderful combination of different flavour ice-*creams',* the text petered out: 'a small tasty toffee make up a desert like' [end of text].

In Year 6, a less direct, but subtly effective, appeal to the reader was focused on the dessert's ingredients, 'A rich selection of toffee, fudge, butterscotch and cinder toffee flavoured ice cream is irresistible on these hot summer days'. The persuasive style was continued with a more direct appeal to the reader in 'tempting chunks of your favourite toffees' and the appeal to the reader was maintained to the 'small print' ending, with a final element of consumer choice, centre-set on the page: 'served with wafer (optional)'.

Other features that appeared in Helen's Year 6 text that were not evident in Year 5 included some underlining and more expanded descriptive detail: 'two scrumpcious, fudge-centred chocolate covered flakes' and more detailed, slightly alliterative, description of ingredients: 'tempting chunks of your favourite toffees'. Perhaps the most distinctive development in Helen's writing was her final Year 6 sentence, which used subordination to

effect a rousing persuasive appeal: ‘Topped with a large dollop of chocholate sauce.... the toffee tower will definatley be the most delightful thing you have ever tasted!’

Among the other pupils in this sub-group, the development of Luke’s writing was evident through a more consistent persuasive style and a more convincing direct appeal to the reader. His Year 5 text was largely descriptive and list-like. It began ‘The Toffee Tower comes with homemade icecream of eny flavor you want [...] banna, mint, Toffee, rasberry, choclate, strawberry and many others’. The rather blunt ending lacked engagement with the reader: ‘Come on you would be mad not to try it’.

Luke’s Year 6 text began with a more consistent persuasive style: ‘Try the knew “Toffee Tower” the knew tasty desert that will get your tastebuds tingling’. Likewise, the ending, although forthright, seemed more likely to engage the reader and was further supported by some small print: ‘So get down to Treats café* befor they all sell out and they have none left!

**I’m off to get one*’ [written as a footnote, near the bottom of the page].

For another pupil, Octavia, the main characteristics of her writing development lay in an increased organisational structure and sense of audience. Her Year 5 text largely comprised a list of the attractive qualities of the dessert, beginning ‘The Toffee Tower has ..’ and continuing with ‘It has..’, ‘it has..’ and ‘it has..’. Although the two texts were of similar length (102 and 106 words respectively) and the text ended by announcing ‘*IT’S* DELIGFUL’, the Year 6 text had a more elaborate structure. This was founded on an attention-grabbing opening sentence: ‘Come to *Treats café it’s got all the food you like but theres one big difference, we have created this new ice cream called “Toffee Tower”*’. Expanded descriptive detail was followed by some use of hyperbole (‘there is two flakes that *you’ll die for*’) and a final direct appeal to the reader: ‘So come down to Treats café we will make your life SUPER DELICIOUS’.

Discussion

The sustained attention to persuasive writing, through the repeat use of the NFER Literacy Impact advertisement task, provided some indications of development, as indicated by the increases in standardised scores related to five generic constituents of writing. Such development in generic writing skills over a 12-month period might seem only to be expected, as the study was undertaken during a time when attainment in school literacy was attracting national interest (Beard et al., 2009, p. 1). However, the results from the use of the new rating scales provided several additional sources of data: (i) profiles of the use of specific textual features of advertisements; (ii) indications of development in the children's writing that could not be ascertained from other numerical or impressionistic judgements; (iii) indications of how some of the broader challenges of persuasive writing might be addressed, through greater attention to the textual features that might help secure this development.

The proportion achieving a lower score in Year 6 may appear surprising. There are several possible explanations. Subsequent use of the same testing instrument may threaten internal validity in repeat-measure studies, as participants' familiarity with the instrument affects their performance (Dörnyei, 2007, 53–4). Seven of the 12 children whose scores had decreased most came from one class, perhaps suggesting that within-class factors were responsible for the lower attainment scores in that Year 6 setting. Also, as was stated in the Procedure section above, the ratings for grammar, vocabulary and style, punctuation, spelling and handwriting in the Literacy Impact tests are made across 'persuasive description' and 'imaginative narrative', so that the specific performance in the former, in relation to these constituents of writing, is not made available. In addition, when the 12 children whose scores had decreased most are compared with the 13 highest gain children, the mean differences in

test scores was only 4.8, with a range of 2–8, compared with 8.5 in the high gains group, with a range of 6–13.

Broadly characterised, the writing data appeared commensurate with the theories of Kinneavy, Packard, Cook and Crystal. The writing seemed to reflect an intuitive recognition that its primary aim was to change the behaviour or beliefs of the audience, thus bestowing a 'sense of power' in the young writers. There were numerous individualised examples of the use of vivid vocabulary, short catchy phrases and conversational, elliptical syntax.

The findings also suggested that, where development was evident across the sample as a whole, it occurred across both (i) the generic constituents assessed by the Literacy Impact test and (ii) nearly all the textual features in the rating scales. Although not all the developments reached statistical significance, this may in part be related to the limited time on the task and to the text lengths. The pattern of development seemed consistent with increasing mastery, from the more general maintenance of the advertisement form to the more specific use of bold type and/or capital letters to add emphasis. This was accompanied by the inclusion and development of persuasive points, a snappy summary and the use of precise information, including a description of the dessert's features and a memorable 'take home' message. These positive changes were reinforced by increases in the use of verb and noun phrases.

As advertisement writing was not a part of the national curriculum guidance reportedly followed by the participating schools during the time of the study, the issue of what may have influenced the profile of development is an interesting one to consider. Given the possible interactions between development, experience and curriculum, discussed earlier in the article, such considerations are inevitably very speculative.

The daily experiences of the curriculum may well have had some impact on the pupils' generic writing skills, in the light of conventional school expectations and also the

national interest in literacy attainment noted earlier in this discussion. Furthermore, curriculum work on the construction of an argument for an oral presentation may have had some influence on the sequencing of information in the format of persuasive writing (see Table 5). However, many of the changes in the use of the textual features set out in Tables 4–7 may be more related to different kinds of media exposure, consumer experiences out of school and more general personal maturation. Many of the persuasive techniques appeared to derive from experiences of reading and hearing advertisements, perhaps linked to images from commercial sources. Such derivation would provide support for the argument that the development of appropriate persuasive features is not simply a matter of transferring persuasive strategies used in informal oral dialogue to written monologues (Erftmier, 1985). There were also indications in the qualitative data that effective advertisement writing may in part be based on the writer's ability to link to the 'subconscious needs, yearnings and cravings' of the target audience, as suggested by Packard (2007; see also Cook 1992, 2008).

The findings also build upon the previous work on children's persuasive writing reveiwed above, including the use of a 'contextually relevant' task (Crowhurst 1990) and engagement in a 'real life issue' (Riley and Reedy, 2005). As well as providing general evidence of the positive effects of goals focused on content and audience (Midgette et al. 2008), there were specific instances of children using 'high pressure/hard sell' persuasive techniques that became less exaggerated and more subtle with age (c.f. Flavell et al. 1968). The reduction in a 'consistent focus on persuasion' and the inclusion of the name of the product may also have reflected this tendency, with more sophisticated persuasive techniques, including both syntactic and lexical embellishments (Crystal 1995), and less reliance on the repetition of the product name. The increase in the descriptive details of the product, and the greater targeting of the audience through these embellishments (Yeh 1998) indicated increased subtlety of judgments in the pursuit of persuasive goals (Packard 2007).

Future studies might also extend this exploratory study by giving the children opportunities to comment upon their work, to compare their Year 5 and Year 6 texts, to explain some of the choices that they had made in composing them and to address the role of visual and non-verbal images in persuasive techniques. The study has also suggested several other lines for future writing research, including the following: What textual features characterise other kinds of persuasive writing? What kinds of rating scale are most appropriate when investigating them? Which features in the ebb and flow profiles secure the basis for subsequent, incremental growth? What kinds of classroom practice foster such development? How might these practices draw upon different kinds of media exposure and consumer experiences out of school? In what ways might persuasive writing techniques be fostered by attention to advertisements in other modalities, including those linked to commercial sources?

Conclusion

This exploratory study comprised an investigation into a particular kind of persuasive writing. The study illustrated how the use of a repeat-measures design, focusing particularly on textual features, may contribute to studies of writing development. It comprised a positive response to Dörnyei's (2007 78) 'strong case' for the use of more longitudinal designs in applied linguistics investigations. The qualitative analysis of the sub-samples allowed further investigation of some of the 'dynamic change patterns' that the longitudinal study revealed, also in keeping with the methodological suggestions of Dörnyei (2007 88).

In the light of the 'problem' of persuasive writing, referred to at the beginning of the present article, there were also indications that appropriately supported experience of advertisement writing could contribute to children's abilities in tackling other forms of persuasive writing. While the increase in the strategic use of bold type, emphatic capital

letters and a memorable 'take home' message may have a limited wider use, the increase in several other textual features may have wider and more nuanced applications. Examples are the inclusion and development of persuasive points, a snappy summary and the use of precise information. Similarly, the increases in the use of verb and noun phrases represent important additions to a young writer's repertoire for use in many textual genres.

A final implication of the study is that advertisement writing warrants greater attention in literacy education, following the prescient work of Leech (1966). As a distinguished professor of linguistics, Leech made a strong case for recognising the potential of advertisements as a means of developing and studying pragmatic writing skills, a case that deserves to be considered anew.

Acknowledgements

[Insert Acknowledgements here]

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Appendix

Development in Writing at the End of Key Stage Two

Rating Sheet for Persuasive Task

Rater: **Script:**

Ability to write in a style appropriate to audience and purpose

	Accurate	Problems
Attention to task purpose [1]		

Style appropriate to audience and purpose	Yes	No
Advertisement form is maintained [2]		
Addresses reader [3]		
Clear evidence of purpose (attempts to convince reader) [4]		
Consistent focus on persuasion [5]		
Simple present tense [6]		
Use of bold type and/or CAPITAL letters to add emphasis [7]		

Viewpoint	Yes	No
Clear and consistent viewpoint established [8]		
Conversational relationship with audience (style / tone) [9]		

Content included to impress audience [10]		
Speaker's knowledge is established / authoritative voice [11]		

Ability to select and sequence information in the format of persuasive writing

Stage 1: Attracting Attention

Opening sentence / phrase	Yes	No
Opens with a sentence or phrase that aims to capture the audience's attention ('hook') [12]		

Nature of 'hook'	Yes	No
A little drama [13]		
A story [14]		
A problem in need of a solution [15]		

Stage 2: The Information

Key information about the product	Yes	No
Is the information precise? [16]		
Is the information given relevant? [17]		

Overview of product with appropriate supporting detail	Yes	No
Name of product [18]		
Description of dessert's features [19]		
Nominated audience (Who is the product for?) customers,		

children, adults, ice cream lovers [20]		
Availability of product (Where can you get it?) [21]		
Explanation of its appeal to the audience (What does it do for you?) (Why should you buy it?) [22]		
A series of persuasive points [23]		
Development of above points by adding more detail [24]		

Stage 3: The Slogan

	Yes	No
Memorable ('take home') message [25]		
Concluding appeal to the reader [26]		
Snappy summary of the information given [27]		

Stage 4: The Small Print (optional)

	Yes	No
Inclusion of small print [28]		

<u>Ability to construct paragraphs</u>

Use paragraphs to organise ideas	Yes	No
Well organised paragraphs [29]		
Opening paragraph establishes persuasive purpose [30]		

<u>Ability to use a variety of sentences</u>

Use of sentences	Yes	No
Effective use is made of a variety of sentence types [31]		
Uses a mixture of long and short sentences for effect [32]		

Ability to link ideas

Linking of ideas	Yes	No
Coherent / ordered linking of ideas [33]		
Mainly logical connectives [34]		

Ability to choose words which enhance the writing

Stylistic choices focus on persuasive appeal	Yes	No
Snappy slogan [35]		
Exaggeration [36]		
Intriguing question - to catch reader's attention [37]		
Adjectives / adverbs for emphasising [38]		
Wordplay (linguistic patterning, alliteration, figurative language) [39]		
Tempting description of the benefits of the product [40]		

Vocabulary chosen for persuasive effect	Yes	No

Noun phrases [41]		
Adverbials [42]		
Verb phrases [43]		

Table 1. Rating scores for persuasive purpose and organisation in Literacy Impact Test B.

Textual Features	Rating Score
Simple persuasive appeal to reader Some attempt at non-chronological organisation Some inclusion of detail	2
Persuasive appeal to reader used to some effect Basic non-chronological organisation evident Some inclusion of detail to support the persuasive description	4
Persuasive appeal to reader used fairly consistently for effect Non-chronological structure provides a logical framework for each section Developed persuasive description includes appropriate level of detail	6

Table 2. Summary statistics from Year 5 and Year 6 Literacy Impact Test B scripts.

	Y5 (n=111)	Y6 (n=112)
Mean	15.80	19.07
Median	14.00	19.00
Standard Deviation	7.006	6.281
Range	27	27

Table 3. Mean score in each category for Year 5 (n=111) and Year 6 (n=112)

Category	Y5 Mean score	Y5 Standard deviation	Y5 Range	Y6 Mean score	Y6 Standard deviation	Y6 Range	T	df	P-value
Purpose and Organisation	3.54	1.73	6	4.24	1.61	9	3.757	110	<0.001
Grammar, Vocabulary and Style	3.28	1.57	6	3.88	1.33	5	3.822	110	<0.001
Punctuation	1.26	1.09	4	1.95	0.89	4	6.488	110	<0.001
Spelling	1.71	0.99	3	1.97	0.78	4	3.019	110	0.003
Handwriting	1.35	0.96	3	1.58	0.85	3	2.380	110	0.019

Table 4. Proportions of pupils using textual features of style appropriate to audience and purpose.

Feature	% use in Y5	% use in Y6	Change in %	P-value (McNemar)
Advertisement form is maintained	63.6	75.7	+12.1	0.038
Use of bold type/capital letters to add emphasis	14.5	26.1	+11.6	0.011
Attention to task purpose	80	90.1	+10.1	0.043
Clear evidence of purpose (attempts to convince reader)	80.9	85.6	+5.7	0.327
Conversational (style/tone) with audience	86.4	91	+4.6	0.627
Content included to impress audience	74.5	77.5	+3	1.000
Addresses reader	80	82.9	+2.9	0.608
Simple present tense	97.3	100	+2.7	N/A
Speaker's knowledge is established/authoritative voice	80	81.1	+1.1	1.000
Consistent focus on persuasion	81.8	80.2	-1.6	1.000

df =1 for all calculations

Table 5. Proportions of pupils using textual features to select and sequence information in the format of persuasive writing.

Feature	% use in Y5	% use in Y6	Change in %	P-value (McNemar)
Development of persuasive points by adding more detail	51.8	69.4	+17.6	0.007
A series of persuasive points	57.3	71.2	+13.9	0.004
Snappy summary of the information given	20.9	33.3	+12.4	0.044
Memorable (‘take home’) message	50	62.2	+12.2	0.059
Is the information precise?	75.2	86.5	+11.3	0.029
Explanation of its appeal to the audience (What does it do for you?) (Why should you buy it?)	57.3	64	+6.7	0.302
Description of dessert's features	91.8	98.2	+6.4	0.065
Nature of ‘hook’: A story	34.5	40.5	+6	0.488
Is the information given relevant?	80.7	86.5	+5.8	0.286
Concluding appeal to the reader	61.8	67.6	+5.8	0.392
Nominated audience (Who is the product for?)	29.1	33.3	+4.2	0.487
Availability of product (Where can you get it?)	43.6	47.7	+4.1	0.511
Nature of ‘hook’: A little drama	30	33.3	+3.3	0.636
Inclusion of small print	5.5	8.1	+2.6	0.607
Opening sentence or phrase to capture audience's attention (‘hook’)	75.5	77.5	+2	0.868

Nature of ‘hook’: A problem in need of solution	2.7	3.6	+0.9	1.000
Name of product	92.7	90.1	-2.6	0.629

df =1 for all calculations

Table 6. Proportions of pupils using textual features to construct paragraphs, use a variety of sentences and link ideas.

Feature	% use in Y5	% use in Y6	Change in %	P-value (McNemar)
Effective use is made of a variety of sentence types	36.4	47.7	+11.3	0.060
Coherent/ordered linking of ideas	65.5	74.8	+9.3	0.143
Uses a mixture of long and short sentences for effect	25.5	34.2	+8.7	0.154
Mainly logical connectives	50.9	56.8	+5.9	0.480
Well-organised paragraphs	33.6	37.8	+4.2	0.618
Opening paragraph establishes persuasive purpose	70	70.3	+0.3	1.000

df =1 for all calculations

Table 7. Proportions of pupils using textual features to choose words that enhance the writing.

Feature	% use in Y5	% use in Y6	Change in %	P-value (McNemar)
Use of verb phrases	39.1	52.3	+13.2	0.036
Word play	28.2	38.7	+10.5	0.126
Use of noun phrases	81.8	91	+9.2	0.041
Use of adverbials	49.1	56.8	+7.7	0.312
Intriguing question - to catch reader's attention	15.5	22.5	+7	0.256
Adjectives/adverbs for emphasis	85.5	91.9	+6.4	0.210
Snappy slogan	30	36	+6	0.360
Tempting description of the benefits of the product	39.1	40.5	+1.4	0.894
Exaggeration	59.1	58.6	-0.5	1.000

df =1 for all calculations

Table 8. Persuasive description: What characterised high attainment?

Textual Element	Features
Overall effectiveness of persuasive description	Clear organisational structure Consistent persuasive appeal Direct appeal to the reader Lively, animated and confident style Frequent use of underlining, capitals, brackets and exclamations for effect
Content	Description of ingredients and consumer appeal Key information on ingredients, features, consumer appeal and availability
Language use	Frequent use of descriptive vocabulary Adventurous choice of adjectives and verbs Frequent use of word play Advertisement-style language - including some use of hyperbole Vocabulary chosen for strong persuasive effect Use of complex sentences
Other	Higher mean length: Year 5, 99 words; Year 6, 122 words

Table 9. Persuasive description: What characterised consistently low attainment?

Textual Element	Features
Overall effectiveness of persuasive description	Limited use of the organisational features of persuasive genre
	Style not particularly persuasive
	Less likely to include direct appeal
	Writing repetitive in places
	Less likely to use underlining, capitals, brackets and exclamations for effect
Content	Emphasis on dessert's ingredients
	Some key information omitted
	Less likely to include some information on value for money or customer satisfaction
Language use	Limited use of descriptive vocabulary
	Limited evidence of expanded description
Other	Lower mean length: Year 5, 61 words; Year 6, 66 words
	Handwriting often a mixture of print and joined; or only print
	Capital letters and full stops not always used; other forms of punctuation often missing or incorrectly used

Table 10. Persuasive description: What characterised high gains?

Textual Element	Features
Overall effectiveness of persuasive description	Increased organisational structure and sense of audience More consistent persuasive style More convincing direct appeal to reader Increased use of underlining, capitals, brackets and exclamations for effect
Content	More detailed description of ingredients, integrated with consistent persuasive appeal Increase in amount of key information (ingredients, features, consumer appeal, availability)
Language use	Vocabulary more appropriately chosen to add interest and for persuasive effect Expanded descriptive detail and adjectives used for strong persuasive appeal Advertisement type language - including some use of hyperbole More complex sentence constructions
Other	Increased mean length: Year 5, 83 words; Year 6, 99 words.