To the Editor,

While all research provides us with useful information, we have strong concerns about the conclusions reached by Koziatek and Powell (2003) in their study, "Pencil grips, legibility and speed of fourth-graders' writing in cursive" in the May/June issue of AJOT. Koziatek and Powell used the Evaluation Tool of Children's Handwriting-Cursive (ETCH-C) to assess the legibility and speed of fourth grade students with varying pencil grasps. Their findings are definitely useful for understanding current grasp patterns being used, as well as current writing speed scores on the ETCH-C. However, two important conclusions were not supported. Because there was no significant difference in speed and legibility for subjects using different pencil grasps, they concluded that the "dynamic quadrupod", "lateral tripod", and "lateral quadrupod" should be considered "mature pencil grips" and "equal in function to the dynamic tripod" (pp. 287). Their photos (including frequent significant hyperextension of the DIP joint of the index finger) and use of the atypical grasps (without dynamic thumb use) suggest some of the participants may have incomplete development of prehension patterns. Due to the biomechanical differences in these grasps, these children would be at high risk for difficulties in functional performance. This research, the discussion, and reported limitations of the study did not address endurance, effort, or comfort (pain) (short term or long term) related to each grasp. Based on previous work and theories developed by OTs known for their work in handwriting, hand development, and pencil grasp (Amundson, 1992; Benbow, 1995; Boehme, 1988; Erhardt, 1994), these would be important factors to address, prior to making conclusions.

If the conclusions of the authors are left unchallenged, a number of unanticipated responses may occur. First, occupational therapists may begin to accept these atypical grasps as something within the "normal" developmental profile and thus should not have a negative impact on function and do not need to be addressed. Second, if these conclusions are accepted, it could result in a denial of services for children who are unable to meet their environmental demands. In fact, this study was already referenced during an individual education plan meeting for a child's special education services.

While occupational therapists do not need to provide intervention for a pencil grasp that is functional for a child, we also want to be careful that we are not defining a child's ability to engage in occupation based solely on a particular score on a test.

Sincerely,
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