THE IMPACT OF HOME-SCHOOL CONNECTION ACTIVITIES ON A PRESCHOOLER'S

PRE-LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER of EDUCATION

by

Elizabeth Braun

William Paterson University of New Jersey

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College/School: <u>College of Education</u>

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ABSTRACT

Parental involvement in a necessary part of students' education. It has an impact on students' outcomes in school. How important is parental involvement for preschoolers? That question led to the development of the research question: how do home-school connection activities affect a preschooler's pre-literacy development? A review of literature was conducted to examine topics that relate to the research question. The study is composed of 7 preschoolers who are the research participants. Through supplemental worksheets, Teaching Strategies Gold, and professional journal notes I sought to determine the impact of parental involvement on a students pre-literacy skills. The outcome was that the home-school connection positively impacts a preschooler's pre-literacy development.

DEDICATION

To Edie, thank you for being a role model for my educational career. Thank you Marco for your continued love and encouragement through the research project. Thank you to my family for your support to help me complete this task.

Thank you Dr. Hong for your guidance. Thank you for supporting me every step of the way.

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CHAPTER I

Statement of the Problem

Introduction

In a preschool classroom you can expect to hear laughter and happy children, but you will also hear crying and frustration. This frustration can be heard when it is time for students to write their names. It can be a battle to get a preschooler to write, but learning to write their name is a very important step in their education.

For students to be successful in school, teachers and parents need to have a supportive relationship. Parents should reinforce the information at home that students learn in school. Georgia Family Connection Partnership (2023) asserts that "family and adult engagement on early childhood education, specifically pre-K, significantly impacts child development and student academic and social outcomes over time—and contributes to the long-term impacts of high-quality education" (para. 1). Family involvement plays a huge role in education and it starts in preschool. When parents are engaged in their child's education, it strengthens the relationship between parents and children.

According to New York City (NYC) Public Schools, "when families are involved with their children's education, children tend to perform better in school" (2024, par. 2). Teachers need to work with their students' families to form a "partnership of support for children" so they can be successful in school and meet their goals (NYC Public Schools, 2024, para. 2). In New York when parents are involved in a student's education they can achieve more.

Pre-literacy and early literacy skills are very important for students to develop correctly. Early literacy skills play "a key role in enabling the kind of early learning experiences that research shows are linked with academic achievement, reduced grade retention, higher

graduation rates and enhanced productivity in adult life" (Strickland & Riley-Ayers, 2006, para. 1). These skills are important for lifelong language acquisition. Pre-literacy and early literacy skills can be improved from parental involvement and direct, small group instruction.

From my own experience, the students who practice writing their name at home with their parents learn how to write their names faster than the students who do not. Students who do not practice at home with their parents have a harder time learning how to do so. Learning to write their name is a crucial step in their education. By writing their name, students learn letters and their sounds. From writing letters and participating in read-alouds, students realize that letters make up words and words have meaning. Preschoolers need strong pre-literacy skills; they need a solid foundation before they start kindergarten. The realization of print awareness is crucial in the literacy development of preschoolers. I believe that preschoolers need parental involvement the most in their education. This is their first school experience; it will set the foundation for the rest of their education.

My main question is about the importance of the home-school connection. I will also discuss the impacts it has on a preschooler's pre-literacy development.

Research Questions

This section states the research question. The question evolved out of the problem detailed above. The research question is...

- How do home-school connection activities affect a preschooler's pre-literacy development?

In addition to the primary research question, the study also investigates the related question below.

- What can parents do at home to help their students?

- How can teachers and parents form strong, supportive relationships?

Definition of Terms

This section gives a definition of terms that will be used throughout this research article. This research study was designed to answer the research question: How do home-school connection activities affect a preschooler's pre-literacy development?

Parental Involvement – Parental involvement is when a parent is involved in their child's education. It is "defined as parental aspirations for their children's academic achievement, parents' communication with their children about education and school matters, parents' participation in school activities, parents communication with teachers about their children, and parental supervision at home" (Fan, 2011, p. 29).

Pre-literacy – Pre-literacy is defined as the period before a child can read or write on their own. Pre-literacy includes "skills such as oral language and phonological and phonemic awareness (the awareness of sounds), as well as knowledge of the alphabet and an understanding of common print concepts (print goes from left to right and from up to down on a page)" (Scholastic Parents, 2018, para. 1).

Preschooler – For the parameters of this study, a preschooler is a student enrolled in Universal Prekindergarten 4 (UPK4) between the ages of 3 and 5-years-old. A child who begins the school year in September at 3-years-old must turn 4-years-old on or before December 1 of that same year.

Theoretical Framework

This section presents the theoretical framework selected based upon the research question. The research question is how do home-school connection activities affect a preschooler's pre-literacy development? This question was used to identify the theoretical

framework. This framework includes the following theories: Zone of Proximal Development

(Vygotsky) and Scaffolding (Jerome Bruner).

Zone of Proximal Development

The theory of the zone of proximal development was created by psychologist Vygotsky

(1978). The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is the "concept that defines development as

the space between the child's level of independent performance and the child's level of

maximally assisted performance" (Bodrova & Leong, 1998, p. 2). Students learn best in a certain

zone of learning. If the skill is within the students zone, it is neither too easy, nor too hard. The

skill is at the right level for the student, with teacher assistance. Students learn how to complete

tasks through imitation or modeling (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 33). Students learn when teachers

model how to write a letter, and then they copy it step by step.

Vygotsky believed that every person has two stages of skill development. There is a stage

where students can achieve things by themself and a stage where students can achieve things

with help. There are three zones in the theory of zone of proximal development. The first zone is

what students cannot do on their own. Students cannot do the task even with help from their

teachers or parents. The second zone is what students can do with help. Students can complete

tasks but will need help from their teachers or parents. The last zone is when students can

complete the task independently. Students do not need help from teachers or parents. They can

do all the work by themselves, independently. Teachers need to know what zone their student is

in to best support them. Giving students too much or too little support can affect their confidence

and motivation. The appropriate amount of help needs to be given to students as they go through

each zone. If students need help, but are not given any, they may fall behind.

Scaffolding

Scaffolding describes "the types of assistance that make it possible for learners to function at higher levels of their zones of proximal development" (Bodrova & Leong, 1998, p. 2). Scaffolding does not make it easier for students to complete a task, it makes it possible for students to complete a task. Teachers offer assistance and tools for the student to learn, then withdraw assistance as the student is able to do more by themself. Scaffolding is "an effective and sustainable instructional mechanism for introducing and teaching" writing to young students (Chen & Adams, 2023, p. 926). The desired final result from scaffolding is to make sure students have the ability to complete the desired task. The student gains more control over the task over time. When students take over full control, the teacher no longer has to scaffold or offer support to that student.

There are many different types of scaffolding. Preschool teachers should use "modeling, questioning, and prompting exploration to scaffold children's learning. These ways aimed to scaffold children's 'progress to new levels of knowing and acquisition'" (Maryam et al., 2019, p. 80). Scaffolding is support based on the students' zone of proximal development. Scaffolding helps a student complete a task without frustration.

Educational Significance of this Issue

When students enter preschool, teachers can tell which students are getting instruction from their parents at home. Some students know how to hold a pencil or a book correctly, while a large majority do not. If a student's parents are not invested in their education, the student will most likely not be as motivated or focused. Adults do not realize the massive impact they have on their student's education. Positive parent involvement and support in education can help disadvantaged students. "One study with parents of children attending Head Start found that

home-based parenting practices, including parent-child reading and learning activities, predicted substantial growth during preschool in areas of attention and language skills, and reduction in problem behaviors" (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2017, p. 4). Head Start is a nationwide program that offers free learning to children from low income families from birth to 5-years-old (Head Start, 2024, para, 4). Head Start ensures that children from low income areas have the access to education to close the educational gap and lay a solid foundation for their education.

Many parents from low-income areas do not know how or where to start helping their children. Of these parents, some ask for help and advice on what they can do to help their children. They do their best to help their children succeed. Many parents do not have time to help their children due to work or taking care of other family members. Parents have a significant impact and can make a difference in their child's education.

Research Method

I used a few different methods to collect my research. My first method of data collection was through supplemental worksheets. I sent home worksheets at the end of the week for my students to review and complete with their parents. I took note of who completed and returned the worksheets. I used this to collect data and see what students still remember and know the information. The second method I used was my formative assessment tool, Teaching Strategies Gold, to look at where my students began the school year. I compared the findings and scores in the first and second quarters of the school year. The categories I looked at fall under physical and literacy. I created charts and graphs to compare and keep track of my findings. The last method was through my professional journal. I took a lot of notes on students' progress through observations.

I used a qualitative research method to compare data based on the students' progress. More specifically it is an ethnographic research because it was based on participant observations and behaviors. The observations were paired with data from supplemental worksheets and Teaching Strategies Gold. This will give in-depth research on the impact of home-school connections activities.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to the primary question stated in chapter I. The primary question is how do home-school connection activities affect a preschooler's pre-literacy development? This chapter examines the importance of parental involvement, teacher-parent relationships, and scaffolding.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is extremely important in early childhood education. Ingber and Most (2012) write about the importance of fathers in early childhood, stating "researchers have begun to recognize that fathers' involvement contributes in unique ways to child development" (p. 276). It is important for parents, especially fathers, to be involved in their child's education. Male figures in education motivate and engage students in a different way. Children who have a warm and loving relationship with their families tend to perform better in school and in social situations (Ingber & Most, 2012, p. 278). Parental involvement has proven to positively impact the development of children in early childhood.

Parents need to have strong relationships with their children. Lauer (1994) discusses the downfall of education when families are not involved. A "lack of parental education combined with a lack of literacy experiences denies children the literacy role models in the home so necessary for their emergent literacy development" (Lauer, 1994, p. 15). When parents are not educated it takes a toll on their ability to connect with and help their children with school work. Young students need to be supported by their families in school to reach their full potential. A

happy and positive family foundation is particularly important for children to grow up to be strong, independent members of society.

Starting preschool is a huge transition for children and parents. This is where parents make an enormous difference. McBride (1989) asserts the significance of parental roles in preschool years. "Parents play an important part in making this transition from informal to formal types of learning less traumatic" (p. 4). Preschool is the first time many students are away from their families for the day. It can be incredibly challenging especially for students that have not been away from their families before. This transition is easiest when parents are fully supportive of students beginning preschool. McBride (1989) continues to emphasize home-school partnerships, "teachers are realizing more than ever that they must work in partnership with parents in bridging this gap" (p. 4). It is important that teachers look to their students' families for help when a student is having a challenging time transitioning. Parents may have helpful ideas and insight to make the transition easier for students. For example, they can bring a stuffed animal or family picture to hold when they are upset and miss their family.

There is a connection between parental involvement and students' success in school. Sengahl studies "the relationship between parents' involvement in their children's education and their academic achievement" (Sengonul, 2022, p. 32). The study found a positive relationship between parental involvement and a students' success in school. Parental involvement can be shown by reading a book, doing homework, or asking a child about their day at school. Socioeconomic status plays a part in the relationship between students and their parents (Sengonul, 2022, p. 32). It may not be as easy for parents from lower socioeconomic households to be involved in their children's education due to work, but it is extremely important. Often,

these parents need to work harder to be involved in their children's education. Parents also may not know how to support their child's education.

Teacher-Parent Relationships

Teachers and parents need to have a strong relationship and work together to ensure students are successful. Teachers should not create biases that would get in the way of students getting a well rounded education (Bradford, 1995, p. 18). It is important to bring the interests and lives of students' families into the classroom. Teachers can and should encourage parents and family members to be a part of their students' education. When parents are involved, it is easier for other family members to also be part of it. International day is a great way for parents to get involved in the classroom. Parents can share their culture and experiences with the class.

It is vital that teachers and parents have a relationship. Purtell et al. (2022) discusses the importance of parents and teachers working together. Parent engagement in preschool is important because "early parent engagement often leads to higher levels of engagement in later years" (p. 938). Parents are more likely to stay involved in their children's education, when they become involved in preschool. Preschool is the first step in a student's education so it can and will set the foundation for the years that follow. This relationship also has a positive effect on students' social emotional well-being.

Students need to be supported through their education. "Scaffolding and motivational support from teachers contribute to students' writing development" (Myers et al., 2020, p. 27). Teachers and parents both need to support students. It is a team effort to get students to learn how to write. "When children are supported through encouragement, they are more inclined to engage in the processes of writing activities rather than focus on correctness and conventionality"

(Trujillo & Emerson, 2021, p. 635). Students will enjoy the writing process more if they have positive experiences writing. Young children/ students are very impressionable; they need constant support and reassurance that they are doing a good job. When students receive more support and positivity they are more likely to do well in school. Students care about their parents' thoughts and involvement in their education. They want help doing homework and to be asked what they learned at school, even if it does not always seem like it. Young students want their parents to attend school functions.

Teachers and parents need to work together. With the help of parents at home "a teacher can efficiently provide support to each child, moving him or her toward the next step of writing development" (Cabell et al., 2013, p. 655). Students can achieve more when there are people pushing them to do more. Teachers need to know that when it is time to push their students to the next level parents will support their decision and offer extra support at home. When teachers and parents work together, students can be successful throughout their education.

Scaffolding

Students learn to write their names through scaffolding. Read (2010) discusses the importance of scaffolding in writing instruction. Students start by tracing their names, which is where they will need a lot of scaffolding. When students trace their names, it is very important that teachers or parents show them the correct way to write each letter. If students are not taught how, they will start a bad habit of incorrectly writing letters. As students master tracing, they can move onto writing. This is a big adjustment for students. Students will require the most scaffolding in this area. They will need one-on-one support and scaffolding when this begins, but as students become more familiar, "less scaffolding will be necessary" (Read, 2010, p. 3). With daily exposure and practice writing their name, they will slowly begin to master it. Before no

time, students will be able to write their names by themselves. Teachers can still offer support and attempt to scaffold, but students will want to do it on their own.

Preschool students learn from everyone in their environment. Zurek at al. (2014) writes about the importance of peer interaction in preschool. "Peer interactions play an important role for young children in learning new concepts and developing social behaviors in preschool years" (p. 30). Teachers need to foster a safe, positive school classroom for their students. Students need to feel welcomed in their classrooms. Playtime is a great opportunity for teachers to scaffold social emotional learning time. Students can learn to problem solve, which is a necessity. The social learning theory "suggests that we learn best when learning is situated in a context in which students interact with each other and the teacher in meaningful, purposeful ways" (Read, 2010, p. 2). Dramatic play is when students learn to navigate their social issues. Students learn how to navigate social interactions with the help of a teacher. They see what teachers say and do. After enough time having the teacher help them, students will attempt to solve social situations on their own.

Summary of the Literature Review

This section provides a summary of the studies used in this literature review. Studies were selected for this literature review based on the research question. The research question is, how do home-school connection activities affect a preschooler's pre-literacy development?

Many studies found that it is extremely important for parents to be involved in their children's education. Parental involvement has a positive impact on the education of children. Parental involvement motivates children to learn and inturn leads to higher and better grades. Parental involvement is necessary for students to be successful in their education. When parents

are involved in their children's education, they will perform better and care more about school and learning. Unfortunately, not every parent is going to be able to be all in when it comes to their children's education due to work or financial circumstances.

Teachers and parents need to form a strong, supportive relationship. They need to work together as a team to help their students and children grow. Students need to receive positive affirmations from both their teachers and parents. Teachers should learn more about their students' personal lives which is extremely important.

Scaffolding in preschool is very important. Preschool age students need a lot of support and guidance when learning something new, like writing their names or solving social problems. Teachers need to recognize and be aware of how to scaffold to ensure their students' success without taking away their independence.

CHAPTER III

Research Design

Introduction

Parental involvement is beneficial for all students. However, it has a great impact on young, preschool age students. This chapter describes the qualitative research of this study. The data is collected and analyzed to answer the research question: how do home-school connection activities affect a preschooler's pre-literacy development?

For this study, I was both the teacher-researcher and the participant observed. A qualitative research study was administered which found the impacts on home-school connection activities on preschoolers. There were several sources of data. The first was supplement worksheets that were sent home once a week on the corresponding letter of the week. The second data source was my assessment tool, Teaching Strategies Gold. I monitored and kept track of students' progress between periods two and three. The final data source was my professional journal. I wrote notes based on observations of students and social interactions with students and parents.

Research Setting

The location of my study is a preschool in Rockland County, New York. The population of the town is 32,855 people. The residents of the town include a population of: 41.4% of residents who are White or Caucasian, 32.1% of residents who are Black or African American, 29.3% of residents who are Hispanic or Latino, 5.1% of residents who are two or more races, and 2.6% of residents who are Asian. The average income per household is $21,398 and the median household income for 2022 was $50,749. The percentage of individuals living below the poverty

line is 25.3%. Most people speak a language other than English at home which is 73.4% of individuals. There are 77.0% of individuals over the age of 25-years-old who are a high school graduate or higher, while only 18.5% of individuals over the age of 25 received a bachelor's degree or higher.

The school in my study is a preschool with students ages 18 months to 5-years-old. The school is located in a suburban area, and 184 students currently attend this school. There are thirteen classrooms in the school. There are three toddler rooms with children from the ages 18 months until 3-years-old. The 3-year-old classroom is currently closed due to staffing issues. In addition there are nine universal pre-kindergarten rooms with students 3-years-old until 5-years-old. Of the nine universal pre-kindergarten classrooms, two are inclusion rooms which have general education and special education students. The school offers: special education services, occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech services, and socialization groups.

The population of students include: 73.4% of students who are Hispanic or Latino, 17.1% of students who are Black or African American, 3.6% of students who are Asian, 3.3% of students whose race is unspecified, 2.1% of students who are White or Caucasian, and 0.5% of students who are Pacific Islander.

The study took place in one of the seven general education universal pre-kindergarten classrooms. The classroom consists of 18 students aged four and five-years-old, one head teacher, and two assistant teachers. All students are English language learners; 15 students speak only Spanish at home, two students speak Haitian Creole and English at home, one student speaks Haitian Creole, Spanish, and English at home, and one student speaks both Spanish and English equally at home.

Research Participants

In this study, my role was the teacher-researcher and participant-observer. This is my second year teaching as a universal pre-kindergarten (UPK) teacher. I received my undergraduate degree of Early Childhood and Childhood Education with a concentration in English from SUNY New Paltz. I received my MEd in Curriculum and Learning with a concentration in Teaching Writing P-12 from William Paterson University of New Jersey.

The participants in this study are seven preschool students in my classroom. The students' parents gave me permission to use them in this study. Students also verbally consented through assent forms to be part of this study. Student names will not be used, each student was randomly assigned a letter A through G. All students are native Spanish speakers.

Student A is very shy and reserved with teachers. They do not talk much with adults, but are very active with peers. Student A does not speak a lot, so it can be difficult to tell if they understand a topic covered in class. The student hurries through tasks such as writing inorder to return to playing or drawing pictures. Student A speaks mostly Spanish. They understand English, but do not speak it fluently. This student can identify shapes, colors, and a few letters in their name. Student A can write their first and last name by themself with some assistance.

Student B is very social and active. Student B has a great work ethic. They love to learn new things and always eager to help teachers. Student B is the youngest in the class, so is behind the others educationally. I do not push Student B until they show signs that they are ready to move on. Student B speaks mostly Spanish. They understand English, but do not speak it fluently, like Student A. This student can identify the letters in their name, colors, simple shapes and trace their name.

Student C is social with peers and familiar adults. Student C has an IEP and receives services twice a week. Student C takes their time while completing tasks and often needs to take a mental break to complete it. Student C speaks mostly Spanish at home, but understands and speaks English in the classroom and with one parent. Student C can count to 10, identify simple shapes, and write their first name by themself with little to no help.

Student D is very social with peers and adults. Student D rushes through tasks that get it in the way of playing. Student D does a lot of extra work at home with their parents reading and writing. Student D speaks both Spanish and English at home. Student D can identify all shapes, letters, and count to 40. Student D began the school year already knowing how to write their first name. Student D can now write their first and last name with no help or visuals.

Student E is very social and loves to draw. Student E takes their time while completing tasks; they do not rush. Student E lives in a Spanish speaking household. They can understand English and often use both English and Spanish in sentences to share stories or ask questions. Student E can write their first and last name by themself with some help. They can identify simple shapes, some letters, and colors.

Student F is very active and social with peers and adults. They prefer to do work before playing, so they will not have to stop in the middle of it later. Student F lives in a Spanish speaking household, but is now fluent in English. Student F speaks to adults in English and peers in Spanish. When they are speaking English and cannot remember the word for something, Student F uses visuals or sound effects to substitute the word. Student F can identify colors, letters in their name and shapes (simple and complex). Student F can write their name without help or visuals.

Student G is very social with peers and adults. Student G loves to draw and takes their time when completing tasks. I have Student G complete their work before going to play because they spend a lot of time making sure it is perfect in their mind. Student G lives in a Spanish speaking household; they are helping their parents learn English. Student G speaks primarily English in the classroom and will translate for students who speak Spanish. They can identify shapes (simple and complex), colors, and count to 25. Student G can write their first and last name without visuals or support from teachers.

Data Sources

During the four week study, data was collected from multiple different sources. I examined supplemental worksheets and data from Teaching Strategies Gold assessments, along with my professional journal. The data collected from these sources allowed me to make connections which led to the findings of the research study.

Supplemental Worksheets

The supplemental worksheets were based on the letter we learned that week. For example, if we learned the letter O, I sent home a worksheet on the letter O. I took note of who did and did not return the worksheets and how much was completed. The supplemental worksheets were the most important source of data because it involved the parents. I asked my students who helped them with the worksheet and how they felt after completing it. I also asked the parents for an estimate of how long they spent completing the worksheet. I took note of this in my professional journal.
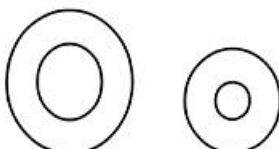
The worksheets I sent home were on the letters O, P, Q and R. An example worksheet of the letter O is below. I did a lot of research to find worksheets that would best support my students and ultimately chose ones from 123 Kids Fun (n.d.).

Figure 1

Supplemental Worksheet Example - Letter O
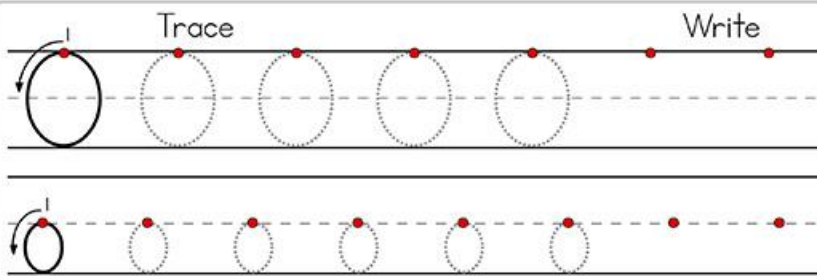
Note. Example of the supplemental worksheets sent home to students once a week.

The skills the worksheets worked on were fine motor skills including tracing, writing, and pencil grip and alphabet knowledge. The "Circle it" box helped students discriminate between the letter O and letters that look similar to it. The "Trace" box includes motions for

students to trace that the student will need to use in order to write the letter correctly. The two "Color" boxes are fun and define their fine motor skills and hand strength. The most important box is the "Trace and Write" box. Students trace the letter five times and write it twice. There is a dot to show students where to start and a line to show students the strokes to write the letter. Fine motor skills are very important for preschoolers. Drawing, playing with playdough, and building with legos are good activities to improve fine motor skills.

Teaching Strategies Gold

The second data source is my formal assessment tool, Teaching Strategies Gold. I looked at the differences in their scores for quarter two and three. Quarter two was due at the end of February, and Quarter three was due at the end of May. I looked to see the differences in their growth in the following categories: 7b - uses writing and drawing tools, 16a - identifies and names letters, 16b - identifies letter-sound correspondences, 19a - writes name. I specifically picked these because they were most relevant to the study.

Professional Journal

My professional journal is where I documented my observations. Since my research is ethnographic, I relied on people. I wrote down interactions with parents and students that I thought were important to my study. I made sure to take detailed notes daily to ensure I had enough observations to help make connections to the research.

The anticipated outcome of the research is to see the impacts of home-school connection activities on a preschooler's pre-literacy development. The results of this research will help me better understand the importance of home-school connection activities. I am looking to determine if there is growth in students' pre-literacy skills with the extra instruction and practice at home.

Data Analysis Procedures

Throughout this four week study I taught the letter of the week as normal during the day. On Mondays we read a book with words that begin with that letter and then watched a short video. Tuesdays we learned how to write the letter in the uppercase and lowercase form on white boards. On Wednesdays, we created a list of words that begin with the letter. On Thursdays, we did a letter hunt during large group time. Students had to find the letter on labels, posters, or games throughout the classroom. In small groups, students trace and write the letter in their journals and draw a picture of something that begins with that letter. Finally on Fridays, we watched an educational and interactive video where students had to help the letter through some tasks by saying the letter sound and drawing the letter in the air.

In addition, on Thursdays, I sent home a supplemental worksheet that included tracing and writing the letter in uppercase and lowercase form. There was a picture of an item that started with that letter. For example, the letter O worksheet had an octopus for students to color. It also included a find it box where students had to find the letter among others. I closely monitored student progress using the various data sources that are named above.

Data Analysis

I collected data for four weeks throughout March and April. In addition, I took notes on the students' worksheets. I took note of when they were returned and how much of the worksheet was completed. I also asked the students questions about the letter and the experience of doing the worksheet. I wrote down who completed the worksheets with parents, siblings, grandparents, etc.

The biggest challenge I found was having students return the worksheets that were sent home. I found it super important to tell students to complete the worksheets with someone at home. Unfortunately, not every student could complete the worksheets with mom or dad, and I did not want them to feel sad about that.

Supplemental Worksheets

I sent one worksheet home on Thursday and asked it to be returned by Monday morning. The worksheet was based on the letter of the week that we learned that week. *Table 1* below shows when the worksheets were sent home and returned to school. *Table 1* can be found in Appendix A.

Table 1

Worksheet Sent Home and Return Dates

	Worksheet 1		Worksheet 2		Worksheet 3		Worksheet 4	
Student	Sent Home	Returned	Sent Home	Returned	Sent Home	Returned	Sent Home	Returned
A	3/7/24	3/11/24	3/14/24	3/18/24	3/21/24	3/25/24	3/28/24	4/8/24
B	3/7/24	3/11/24	3/14/24	3/18/24	3/21/24	3/25/24	3/28/24	4/8/24
C	3/7/24	3/11/24	3/14/24	3/25/24	3/21/24	3/25/24	3/28/24	4/9/24
D	3/7/24	3/11/24	3/14/24	3/18/24	3/21/24	3/27/24	3/28/24	4/9/24
E	3/7/24	3/11/24	3/14/24	3/18/24	3/21/24	3/25/24	3/28/24	4/9/24
F	3/8/24	3/11/24	3/14/24	3/18/24	3/21/24	3/25/24	3/28/24	4/9/24
G	3/7/24	3/11/24	3/14/24	3/18/24	3/21/24	3/26/24	3/28/24	4/8/24

Note. Shows the dates each worksheet was sent home and returned

Table 1 shows that every worksheet was returned. Student F's Worksheet 1 was sent home a day later due to an absence. Student C returned Worksheet 2 at the same time as Worksheet 3. Worksheet 3 was returned to school on three different days. Student D was absent the first two days of the week so returned it the day they came back to school. Student G was in school March 25, but forgot it at home. There was a week off for spring break April 1-5, so the worksheets were returned the following week. The day back from spring break was the day of the April 2024 Solar Eclipse, which was a half day to ensure all students and staff were safe at home. There was low attendance as a result the majority of Worksheet 4 were returned April 9.

I kept track of how much of the worksheets were completed. Completed means that all 5 sections were filled out. All of the worksheets were 100% complete. When students handed in the worksheets, I spent some time asking them questions about the general content of the worksheet. I made sure to comment that I was very proud of them for completing the worksheet.

Teaching Strategies Gold

This is my formal assessment tool I use in my classroom. I assess students in over 70 different categories. The ones I focused on were: 7b - uses writing and drawing tools, 16a - identifies and names letters, 16b - identifies letter-sound correspondences, and 19a - writes name. Once a week, on Fridays, I added anecdotal notes and scores to the above categories to track student progress. *Table 2* has notes that came from what I wrote in my professional journal and then inputted into Teaching Strategies Gold. Some example notes are below.

Table 2

Journal Notes

Date	Student	Area and Note
3/5/24	E	16b - During the activity, Guess the Letter, the student successfully guessed 14 letters when given the sound of the letter.
3/20/24	C	19a - During morning sign in, the student successfully wrote their first name by themself. The student needed assistance with writing the letters in the correct order.
3/28/24	B	19a - During small group, students drew a picture of a flower. On the back of the paper, the student wrote their first initial to write their name. That was the first time the student wrote that letter correctly, on their own.

Note. Notes written in my professional journal

Validity and Reliability

This section presents the validity and reliability for this study. The study was designed to answer the research question: how do home-school connection activities affect a preschooler's pre-literacy development? The data sources that were previously discussed were analyzed to determine if supplement worksheets aided a students ability to learn pre-literacy skills. Parents signed a consent form and students verbally agreed to an assent form to be part of this study. As a participant observer of this study, I ensured the validity of the study. I used different strategies to collect data. The strategies were supplemental worksheets, Teaching Strategies Gold, and my professional journal. I collected data on a daily basis. I checked the data with an experienced researcher. I also shared my professional background so readers have a better understanding of my research topic and subjects. I ensured the reliability of this study by using multiple data

collection strategies. I cross-checked the results from different data sources to find similar or contradicting patterns and outcomes before I concluded the finding.

Limitations

This section presents the limitations for the study. The study was designed to answer the research question: how do home-school connection activities affect a preschooler's pre-literacy development? One limitation is that the data collection was limited to a four week period during the months of March and April. I was not able to complete the study throughout the entirety of the school year, which may have affected the findings of the study. Student absences, vacation days, and half days limited my ability to connect with my students and talk about their work. It also affected my ability to effectively teach the letter of the week. I planned to teach the letter of the week over five days Monday through Friday. Absences affected my ability to teach the letter of the week completely to the students involved in the study.

CHAPTER IV

The Findings

Introduction

Chapter IV provides the findings that were based on the analysis of data that was collected and described in Chapter III. Data was gathered from a variety of sources including: supplemental worksheets, Teaching Strategies Gold, and my professional journal. Supplemental worksheets were sent home with students to see the impacts on parental involvement on a students education. The research this study tried to answer was: how do home-school connection activities affect a preschooler's pre-literacy development? In addition to the primary research question, the study also investigated the related question below.

- What can parents do at home to help their students?

- How can teachers and parents form strong relationships?

The results of the four week study developed into two major themes, relationships and pre-literacy skills. The first theme was relationships, specifically parent-student and teacher-student. The second theme of pre-literacy skills revolved around writing and letter recognition.

Parent-Student Relationships

The first theme found while conducting this research was parent-student relationships. Parental involvement has increased since starting this research. The parents of my students are a lot more involved. Students and parents completed a supplement worksheet together based on the letter we covered in class that week. *Figure 2,* shows the average time spent on the supplement worksheets.

Figure 2

Worksheet Completion Time
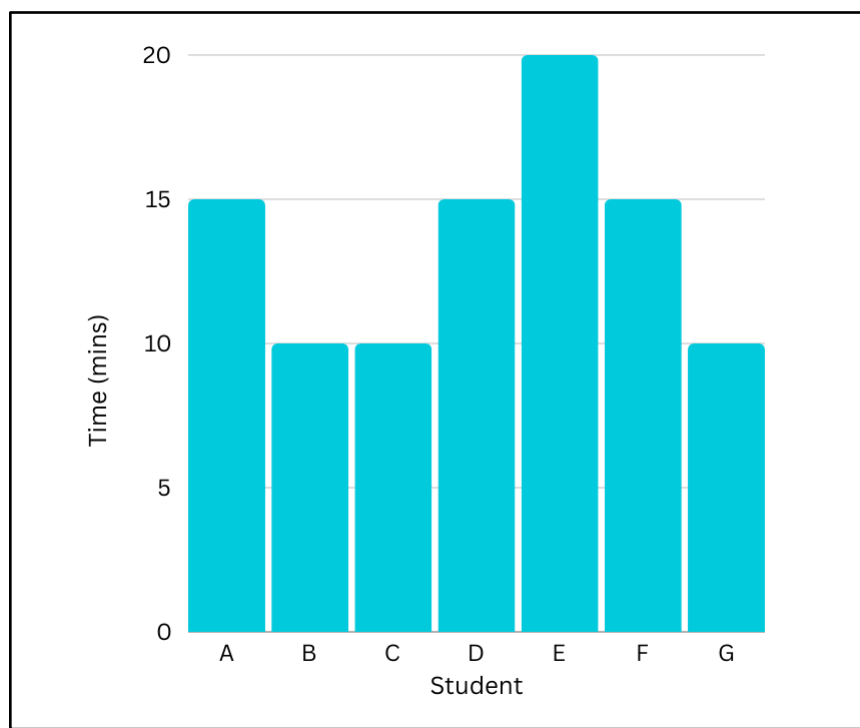
Note. Amount of time students spent completing supplement worksheets

   To get this data I relied on the parents. I asked them about how long they thought they spent doing the worksheets. I found the average time for each student and then the total average. On average, students and parents spent 13.6 minutes together doing the work. This may not seem like a lot of time, but it was extra time spent together learning and doing school work. Which is also less screen time the students got at home. Student E takes their time while coloring. I was not surprised when their mom told me that each worksheet took about 20 minutes since there were two coloring sections on each worksheet. Student E beautifully colored each worksheet. On the other hand, Student A tends to speed through writing in class to return to playing. On the days they received the worksheets, it was the first thing they did at home with a parent before they could have a snack or play with their siblings.

When parents picked up their students from school they would ask questions specifically to what they learned that day. My students loved to share with their parents/ grown-ups what they learned. Parents want to be involved in their students' education, sometimes they just do not know how to get involved.

In addition to how long they spent doing the worksheets, I kept track of who my students completed them with. *Table 3* below shows who the students completed the worksheet with each week.

Table 3

Worksheet Completion Grown-up

Student	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
A	Mom	Mom	Dad	Mom
B	Mom	Brother	Brother	Brother
C	Dad	Dad	Dad	Dad
D	Mom	Dad	Dad	Mom
E	Mom	Mom	Aunt	Mom
F	Dad	Dad	Dad	Mom
G	Grandpa	Dad	Dad	Grandpa

Note. Shows who the students completed their worksheet with

For the most part, the students' mom or dad helped them complete their worksheet. A parent could not do the worksheet with each student every week due to work or other prior engagements. By this point in the school year, I knew what to expect. For example, Student B's brother picks them up from school most days so it made sense that their brother would help complete the worksheet. Similarly, Student G's dad and grandpa pick them up from school together everyday. So I was not surprised when Student G said they completed it with grandpa.

Student G's dad also asked what else they can work on at home to get his child ready for kindergarten.

Teacher-Student Relationships

The second theme found while conducting this research was teacher-student relationships. My students and I formed greater bonds through this research. I was able to spend a few more minutes with the students each day to go over the worksheet. Every Thursday I would tell them the expectations and what they needed to do in each section on the worksheet. On Mondays, or when it was returned, we would spend a few minutes going over the worksheet. I would ask them questions about when they did it, who they did it with, and general knowledge questions about the letter. I spent about 20 more minutes a week in small groups with these students, which does not seem like a lot, but it really strengthened our relationship.

Student A and I have formed a better connection throughout the study. Student A who has been very shy and reserved since the first week of school is starting to open up with me. They are very social with a select group of peers, but was still shy and reserved around myself and other adults that would enter the classroom. Finally, Student A is opening up and talking to me more out of choice and not force.

Student F and I have created a stronger relationship. Beginning week three of the study, we have a morning talk over breakfast. We discussed their weekly shopping trips after school with their mom. Student F also opened up about their best friend outside of school. Through this study, I spent more time with Student F which led us to have conversations that we normally would not have had.

Letter and Name Writing

The third theme found while conducting the study was letter and name writing. During this study I tracked the growth of my students' ability to write letters. More specifically the writing of their own name. *Table 4* shows the starting and ending levels of all students involved in the study according to Teaching Strategies Gold. The section is 19a - writes name.

Table 4

Student Name Writing Growth

Student	Starting Level	Explanation	Ending Level	Explanation
A	12	Writes accurate first name	14	Writes accurate first and last name
B	6	Writes mock letters or letter-like forms	8	Writes letter strings
C	6	Writes mock letters or letter-like forms	12	Writes accurate first name
D	12	Writes accurate first name	14	Writes accurate first and last name
E	6	Writes mock letters or letter-like forms	14	Writes accurate first and last name
F	12	Writes accurate first name	14	Writes accurate first and last name
G	12	Writes accurate first name	14	Writes accurate first and last name

Note. Shows the starting and ending level of students name writing

All students moved up at least two levels throughout the four week study. The most growth came from Student C who jumped six levels in four weeks. That is the quickest growth I have seen in teaching thus far. In September Student C began tracing their first letter and then in November began tracing their name. In week one and two, they began writing their first letter and tracing the rest of their name. During week three, I was able to push them to write some

letters on their own, without tracing. The student is now able to write his full name by himself, which is something that I had been pushing him to do for a while. I was so happy to see that just a little extra work at home can make a big difference overall.

I also tracked the development in my students' tripod grip from my assessment tool, Teaching Strategies Gold. The section is 7b. uses writing and drawing tools. *Table 5* shows the change in students' pencil grip. *Table 5* can be found in Appendix B.

Table 5

Student Pencil Grip Changes

Student	Starting Level	Explanation	Ending Level	Explanation
A	5	Between level 4 grips drawing and writing tools with whole hand but may use whole-arm movements to make marks and level 6 holds drawing and writing tools by using a three-point finger grip but may hold the instrument too close to one end	6	Holds drawing and writing tools by using a three-point finger grip but may hold the instrument too close to one end
B	5	Between level 4 grips drawing and writing tools with whole hand but may use whole-arm movements to make marks and level 6 holds drawing and writing tools by using a three-point finger grip but may hold the instrument too close to one end	6	Holds drawing and writing tools by using a three-point finger grip but may hold the instrument too close to one end
C	5	Between level 4 grips drawing and writing tools with whole hand	6	Holds drawing and writing tools by using a three-point finger grip

		but may use whole-arm movements to make marks and level 6 holds drawing and writing tools by using a three-point finger grip but may hold the instrument too close to one end		but may hold the instrument too close to one end
D	6	Holds drawing and writing tools by using a three-point finger grip but may hold the instrument too close to one end	8	Uses three-point finger grip and efficient hand placement when writing and drawing
E	6	Holds drawing and writing tools by using a three-point finger grip but may hold the instrument too close to one end	8	Uses three-point finger grip and efficient hand placement when writing and drawing
F	6	Holds drawing and writing tools by using a three-point finger grip but may hold the instrument too close to one end	8	Uses three-point finger grip and efficient hand placement when writing and drawing
G	6	Holds drawing and writing tools by using a three-point finger grip but may hold the instrument too close to one end	8	Uses three-point finger grip and efficient hand placement when writing and drawing

Note. States the starting and ending levels of students' pencil grip

As seen in *Table 5*, students' pencil grip increased at least one level. Three students increased from level five to six, while four increased from level six to eight levels. A student's ability to have a good pencil grip is based on their fine motor skills. If a student does not have good fine motor skills, they will not have a consistent tripod grip. Students need to be reminded each time they hold a writing utensil the proper way. The way I teach pencil grip is by using triangular pencils which are thicker than normal pencils and have three sides. Students naturally will hold these pencils using a three finger grip, but that changes when students use crayons and markers. When students are coloring is when I correct pencil grip the most because the grip is less natural.

Letter Knowledge and Recognition

The last theme that appeared was letter knowledge and recognition. Since students had to complete a worksheet based on the letter of the week, their letter knowledge increased. *Table 6* shows the number of students starting and ending letter knowledge. In this table, letter knowledge means recognizing uppercase and lowercase letters as well as letter sound correspondence.

Table 6

Letter Knowledge

Student	Starting Letter Knowledge	Ending Letter Knowledge
A	5	12
B	2	6
C	2	10
D	26	26
E	14	19
F	20	26

G	14	18

Note. Shows the starting and ending number of letters students could identify

All students had increased knowledge of letters. The most growth came from Students A and C. Student A started at five letters and ended at twelve for a growth of seven letters. The starting five letters are the letters in their name. The student now recognizes letters that their friends' names begin with and says "Look, _____'s letter." Student C went from recognizing two to ten letters. These letters are also mainly the letters in their name as well. Student C is starting to understand print awareness which is the print carries meaning. Student C wears a lot of shirts with cartoons on them. Every morning they write and spell their name. Afterwards we also spell the letters of the cartoon's name on their shirts like 'Sonic' or 'Pokemon'. Students typically learn the letters in their name before others. This is due to the reason these are the letters they see most often. Print awareness is a very important part of students' pre-literacy development.

Summary

The two main themes were relationships and pre-literacy skills. Parent-student relationships increased. All students in the study spent more time with their parents or grown-ups completing school work. Parents became more involved in their students' education and asked for advice on how they can best support their child. Stronger teacher-student relationships were also formed. I spent more time with the students throughout the week which in turn led us to grow closer. Finally, students' letter and name writing ability improved as well. Students' ability to write their names increased. I was able to push all students to write at a higher level. The pencil grip of all students increased at least two levels and became more consistent overall. Students were able to identify more uppercase and lowercase letters as well as identify the sound of the letters.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions, Discussions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine how home-school connection activities affect a preschooler's pre-literacy development. From the data analysis, it is concluded that: (1) the home school connection positively impacts students' pre-literacy skills. (2) Parental involvement increases when parents complete assignments with their children. (3) Teachers and parents form stronger relationships when the parents are involved in their students' learning. There is evidence in the current study and other existing research that supports these three conclusions.

Conclusion 1

The home school connection positively impacts students' pre-literacy skills.

Discussion

The data analysis of the findings of the four-week study showed that the participants in this study increased their knowledge of letters. I came to this conclusion from the data of student growth. I discovered that the students were able to recognize more letters in their uppercase and lowercase form as well as identify the letter sound. All of the students were able to identify more letters from the extra instruction at home from a parent. All students were able to identify (uppercase and lowercase) and produce the sound of at least 4 more letters. The largest jump was 5 to 12 letters. Additionally, the students of the study progressed in the ability of writing their own name. There was evidence of their three finger pencil grip becoming more consistent.

Early literacy skills are extremely important in preschoolers development. Strickland & Riley-Averys (2006) stress the importance that early literacy skills have on students "academic achievement" and lifelong education (para. 1). Students need strong pre-literacy skills because

they set the foundation for the rest of their education. Students need to know how to identify and write letters in order to begin to write in elementary school. Without strong pre-literacy skills, students will have a hard time learning how to read and write. When students have good pre-literacy skills, they are able to make powerful connections. Students will begin to process higher order thinking skills which are crucial when students begin school.

Conclusion 2

Parental involvement increases when parents complete assignments with their children.

Discussion

The data analysis of the findings of the four-week study showed that the parent became more involved in the students' education. I came to this conclusion by keeping track of how long the students spent on the supplemental worksheets with their grown-ups. I discovered that students and grown-ups spent on average 13.6 minutes each week together doing the work. In addition, the main grown-ups that helped the students complete their worksheet were their parents, mom and dad. However it was not uncommon for a grandparent, older sibling, or other older family member to assist the student.

Parental involvement is vital in a preschooler's development. Parental figures play a significant role in the preschool years. "Parents play an important part in making this transition from informal to formal types of learning less traumatic" (McBride, 1989, p. 4). Preschool is the first time students are away from their parents for hours at a time. It is also the first school setting for many students.

Sengahl studies "the relationship between parents' involvement in their children's education" (Sengonul, 2022, p. 32). Sengonul's study, much like mine, found a positive relationship between parental involvement and a students' success in school. This became

evident in my four-week study. During pick up the first thing parents would ask is 'What did you learn today?' Parents wanted to be more aware of what their student was doing, but more so learning at school everyday.

Preschoolers "require the support of their families to be successful in any school setting" (Lauer, 1994, p. 17). Although the sample size was small, only seven students, the outcome was amazing. A few extra minutes a week at home working with a grownup shows students did learn more. Parental involvement needs to start early in a student's education. The foundation and relationship built is everlasting.

Conclusion 3

Teachers and parents form stronger relationships when the parents are involved in their students' learning.

Discussion

Teacher and parent relationships have a huge impact on a student's education. Through this study, I have created better relationships with the parents of my students. It started with very simple things like them asking how the day was, to then asking what they can do at home with their child. Parents want to help their students, but oftentimes they do not know where to start. They were more willing to speak up and ask me a question that they would not have before.

Purtell et al. (2022) discusses the importance of parents and teachers working together. "Engaging parents in preschool may be of critical importance, as early parent engagement often leads to higher levels of engagement in later years" (p. 938). Teachers and parents are a team when it comes to educating students. They need to rely on each other to do their part. Parents

need to trust that teachers are educating their students everyday at school. Just like teachers rely on parents to work their students at home to reinforce what they learned at school every day.

Teachers and parents need to be on the same page about a student academically. With the help of parents at home "a teacher can efficiently provide support to each child, moving him or her toward the next step of writing development" (Cabell et al., 2013, p. 655). Teachers need to make sure that the parents will support them when they decide to push a student. With the encouragement of one parent, I was able to push a student to finally write their name by themself.

I spent a few minutes each day scaffolding the parents. I told them what we spent time on doing at school and gave them recommendations on what to work with on their child at home. I relied on the parents to give the students extra instruction. I explained to the parents what we did in class that day either in small group or large group. I also shared the artwork that students were working on, but not yet complete.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the findings of the study on how home school connection activities affect a preschooler's pre-literacy development there are two recommendations for further research. The students in the study are very young, 4 and 5-years-old, therefore further research should investigate the effects on home-school connection activities for older students. Older elementary and middle school students still may still need help with homework. Research could be done to see the effects on their grades and motivation if their parents helped them with their homework every night. The second recommendation is based on the sample size and length of time. This study had a very small sample size of seven students and the study was only four weeks. The students did improve a lot over the four weeks, but more research can still be done.

Recommendations for Teachers

The result of the study provided insight of recommendations for teachers on how to positively affect a preschooler's pre-literacy development. The first recommendation is to incorporate parents into preschool. Invite parents to read a book, lead an activity, or sit in on circle time. Preschool is a big step for parents as well as their children. Inviting parents to come into the classroom leads to stronger and more engaged parents. It also lets parents see what students actually do in school. The next recommendation is to have open communication with parents. It is important to form relationships with the parents of students because teachers will spend the entire year with them. Communication allows parents and teachers to more easily discuss things surrounding school, both good and bad. For preschoolers is it so important that students learn shapes, colors, and letters. Teachers should share resources and educational videos with parents that they can do at home with their children.

Recommendations for Parents

Based on the findings of the study, students' progress in school grew when they spent more time with their parents completing their work. I recommend that all parents help their children with their homework. Students will improve academically, but parents and students can also form better relationships. Parents should motivate and help students complete their work. Parents can ask questions about tests, assignments and their overall day at school. Parental involvement can be shown by reading a book, doing homework, or asking a child about their day at school.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Worksheet Sent Home and Return Dates

	Worksheet 1		Worksheet 2		Worksheet 3		Worksheet 4	
Student	Sent Home	Returned	Sent Home	Returned	Sent Home	Returned	Sent Home	Returned
A	3/7/24	3/11/24	3/14/24	3/18/24	3/21/24	3/25/24	3/28/24	4/8/24
B	3/7/24	3/11/24	3/14/24	3/18/24	3/21/24	3/25/24	3/28/24	4/8/24
C	3/7/24	3/11/24	3/14/24	3/25/24	3/21/24	3/25/24	3/28/24	4/9/24
D	3/7/24	3/11/24	3/14/24	3/18/24	3/21/24	3/27/24	3/28/24	4/9/24
E	3/7/24	3/11/24	3/14/24	3/18/24	3/21/24	3/25/24	3/28/24	4/9/24
F	3/8/24	3/11/24	3/14/24	3/18/24	3/21/24	3/25/24	3/28/24	4/9/24
G	3/7/24	3/11/24	3/14/24	3/18/24	3/21/24	3/26/24	3/28/24	4/8/24

Appendix B. Student Pencil Grip Changes

Student	Starting Level	Explanation	Ending Level	Explanation
A	5	Between level 4 Grips drawing and writing tools with whole hand but may use whole-arm movements to make marks and level 6 holds drawing and writing tools by using a three-point finger grip but may hold the instrument too close to one end	6	Holds drawing and writing tools by using a three-point finger grip but may hold the instrument too close to one end
B	5	Between level 4 Grips drawing and writing tools with whole hand but may use whole-arm movements to make marks and level 6 holds drawing and writing tools by using a three-point finger grip but may hold the instrument too close to one end	6	Holds drawing and writing tools by using a three-point finger grip but may hold the instrument too close to one end
C	5	Between level 4 Grips drawing and writing tools with whole hand but may use whole-arm movements to make marks and level 6 holds drawing and writing tools by using a three-point finger grip but may hold the instrument too close to one end	6	Holds drawing and writing tools by using a three-point finger grip but may hold the instrument too close to one end
D	6	Holds drawing and writing tools by using a three-point finger grip but may hold the instrument too close to one end	8	Uses three-point finger grip and efficient hand placement when writing and drawing
E	6	Holds drawing and writing tools by using a three-point finger grip but may hold the instrument too close to one end	8	Uses three-point finger grip and efficient hand placement when writing and drawing

F	6	Holds drawing and writing tools by using a three-point finger grip but may hold the instrument too close to one end	8	Uses three-point finger grip and efficient hand placement when writing and drawing
G	6	Holds drawing and writing tools by using a three-point finger grip but may hold the instrument too close to one end	8	Uses three-point finger grip and efficient hand placement when writing and drawing