**Reflection Process**

By B. Polnick and D. Reed

Adapted from The Principal Portfolio, 2nd Edition (2000) by G. Brown and B. Irby

*Artifact: Identify the assignment. (Optional) Include any documents that support your completion of the assignment (documents may be scanned).*

001.2 "Solving the School Therapist Shortage", District Administration, March 2015

<http://www.districtadministration.com/article/solving-school-therapist-shortage>

*Describe: Describe the findings for the assignments.*

This article addresses the shortage of occupational therapists and speech language therapists by introducing opportunities for online therapies in the area of occupational and speech therapy. In some areas throughout the United States, there is a shortage of related service providers, and in particular those professionals who work in rural areas. They must sometimes drive several hours to reach their clients. A special education director near the Oregon border found an alternative to her staffing shortage. She researched a new model known as telepractice, where students receive therapy services from therapists online. In the past five years, certain school districts have been using this online model to deliver speech and occupational therapy services as a solution to their staffing shortages.

*Analyze: a. Describe the importance of the findings for the assignment.*

In rural areas throughout the U.S., this particular type of therapy would be beneficial to help with traveling and other logistical matters for speech and occupational therapists. Currently 47% of speech pathologists report staff shortages in their schools. According to the U.S. Department of Education, 18% of children between the ages of 6 and 21 have language disorders that require some form of therapy. For those western area states, using telepractice allows school districts to hire highly qualified therapists as opposed to finding a person who is willing to drive to provide therapy in an online setting. These therapists are able to attend IEP meetings and deliver therapy, however, it is given in a remote setting.

*b. Include connections to your 5 year goals or desired position.*

As an educational diagnostician acting in an administrative role, this is valuable information to have should such a need be required in a school or district I might one day be involved in

*c. Compare/contrast elements in your findings to your experiences or previous knowledge.*

In rural areas where staffing shortages are prevalent, telepractice would be an alternative to delivering therapy for speech and occupational students. It is important to research and implement all possible interventions to reach the need of children who have physical and language based disorders. Currently, Spring Branch ISD employs Speech and Language Pathologists and place them in each school throughout the district. Our Occupational Therapists are contracted through Harris County. This year, Harris County has provided their OT’s help by hiring assistants who help with their caseloads.

*Appraise: Critique or describe whether any of your findings were beneficial to you or not.*

School districts that have used telepractice as a means of delivering speech and occupational therapy, have found it to be successful. Students work through the same exercises as they would face to face, however these exercises are now delivered through the internet and videoconferencing. Research has shown that children are digital natives and have no problems receiving their therapy through the use of technology. Technology has also not affected the relationship developed between therapist and student. In some instances, a paraprofessional assists the student while therapy is being given using telepractice.

*Transform: a. Describe any future ideas or insights you gained.*

The article also stated that by using telepractice, speech and occupational therapists caseloads have been reduced from as much as 85 to as little as 60 cases. Researchers found that 85% of students mastered their IEP goals through telepractice as compared to 47% of students receiving their therapy in more conventional ways (face to face). Other insights are the ability for Spanish speaking students to receive therapy from a bilingual therapist through telepractice. Children with autism also benefitted from the use of videoconferencing. Children with autism showed a greater improvement using telepractice than receiving face to face therapy.

*b. Describe future plans for use of the ideas presented, including any changes in your current practices or, describe how the information confirmed your current practices and/or beliefs.*

As mentioned earlier, it is important for special education directors, therapists and diagnosticians to be aware of all available services in working with students. If there is a shortage of therapists in rural areas, using a program like telepractice is an effective alternative to delivering therapy.