

## Pilot Telepractice Project

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The 2007-2008 school year marked the beginning of a pilot project in Ohio to determine the efficacy of using telepractice service delivery model to provide speech and language therapy series to students in rural school districts. During the first year of the project we provided speech and language therapy services to 35 students in four school districts in Hardin County via live interactive video conferencing. The data collected from that year will soon be published in the Journal of Telemedicine and Telecare.

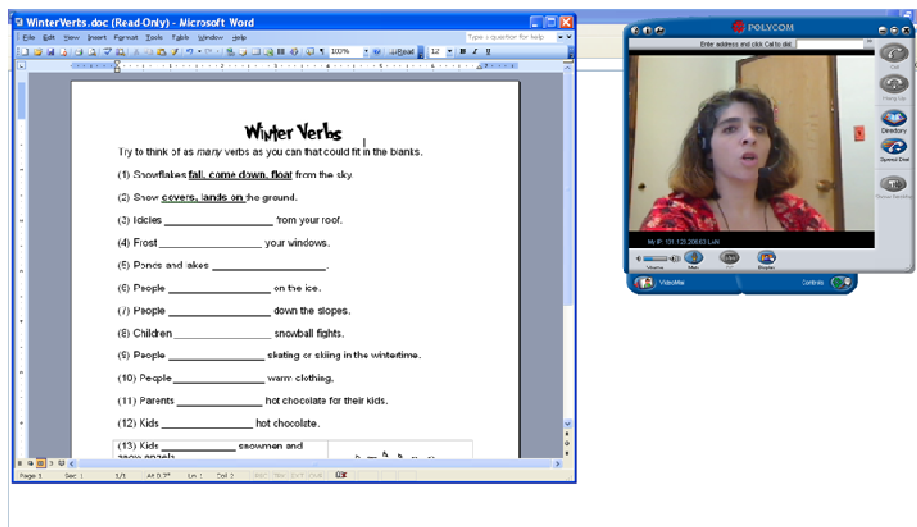
During the second year of the project (2008-2009) we expanded services to include Greenfield Elementary School in the Greenfield Exempted Village Schools. Two e-SLP's, Robin Alvares (pictured below working with a student) and Jackie Taylor, provided services to approximately 90 students. We completed a small articulation study which compared three sets of students: those receiving articulation services through telepractice, those receiving services through computer games with the speech-language pathologist sitting by their side, and those receiving services in a traditional manner. Results suggest that children who receive services by telepractice make similar amounts of progress to children who receive services in the traditional manner. Once again, the Speech Language Pathology and Audiology Department at Kent State University served as the host site for this venture.



We are now in the middle of the third year of the project. We are collaborating with Bowling Green State University this year. Rod Gabel, associate professor at BGSU is working with the project along with our third e-SLP, Leah Bechstein! (Pictured below) The project has expanded into two additional school districts, Hicksville and Northmont, bringing the total to seven school districts and approximately 150-180 students who are receiving speech language therapy services via telepractice. Our research will continue to focus on the effectiveness of this service delivery model.



Therapy sessions via telepractice are very similar to face-to-face therapy sessions, with the exception that the student interacts with the therapist via video conferencing. Many activities are completed with the students through data sharing. The eSLP can bring up an activity on their computer and “share” it with the student at the student. Below is a screen shot of what the student sees when data sharing is employed. Other necessary therapy materials are faxed or delivered to the district prior to therapy sessions and required reports and paperwork are completed primarily on-line through web based software. To date, the data we have collected indicate that the children make similar amounts of progress in therapy provided via telepractice as do children who receive services in a traditional manner. Satisfaction survey results indicate that the students and parents overwhelmingly are pleased with this service delivery model.



There are many challenges facing telepractice, including regular, on-going collaboration with IEP team members, practicing strategies in the regular classroom environment, and incorporating the “e-SLP” into the district educational team. This year, we have attempted to address these challenges in many ways. We have regular communication with teachers and parents through a monthly newsletter (which is posted on this site as well). The educational teams are strongly urged to hold IEP meetings in the speech room so the videoconferencing equipment can be utilized. This not only directly includes the eSLP, but it demonstrates to the parents the type of service delivery their child is receiving. Finally, all students are receiving a checklist to be shown to teachers and parents stating what was targeted during speech-language sessions.

We are excited to have graduate students at both Kent State University and BGSU participating in telepractice this semester. At KSU we have 8 students assigned to the project. Each graduate student will be providing therapy to 2-3 students. At BGSU there are 2 students assigned to the project. This is quite an accomplishment considering this is the first year they are providing telepractice services! The graduate students are being trained to use the equipment and are supplied with internet resources to utilize during therapy sessions. These students will receive 100% supervision while providing therapy through telepractice.

Finally, we are planning an articulation study during the summer semester. We are in the initial planning stages of the study right now, but we are planning a controlled study comparing services delivered through telepractice with traditional therapy.

We are grateful that the Ohio Department of Education, through OMNIE, provided funding for this project. At the end of this project, we hope to provide important information about the efficacy of using this type of service delivery model with Ohio’s school children.