

TRANSCRIPT: Generic Abilities Useful in Clinical Education

In their original work, *A Model for ability-based assessment in physical therapy education*, May et al. described 10 “generic abilities” that emerged from their large, and structured survey across multiple clinical sites as “the most important abilities for graduates to possess.” Generic abilities are behaviors, attributes or characteristics that are not explicitly part of a profession’s core of knowledge and technical skill but nevertheless, are important for success. While their study focused on physical therapy clinical settings, May et al’s findings have since found traction in clinical education more broadly.

So let’s take a look at what these 10 generic abilities are and how they might exhibit themselves in beginning audiology or speech language pathology students in a clinical setting.

(1) The first identified ability is a “commitment to learning.” This is defined as the ability to self-assess, self-correct, and self-direct; to identify needs and sources of learning; and to continually seek new knowledge and understanding.

Some of the behavioral criteria identified for assessing this ability include: identifying problems, formulating questions, prioritizing information needs, seeking additional learning opportunities, setting personal and professional goals, and researching and studying areas where knowledge is lacking

What does this look like in practice? It might be expressed as a student whom, upon interacting with a patient who presents with a unique issue or an unfamiliar problem, takes it upon herself to pose questions and identify resources that may help answer her own questions and identify appropriate strategies for assessment or intervention.

(2) The second identified ability is “interpersonal skills.” This is defined as the ability to interact effectively with patients, families, colleagues, other health care professionals, and the community and to deal effectively with cultural and ethnic diversity issues.

Some of the behavioral criteria identified for assessing this ability include: demonstrating respect for differences, assuming responsibility for one’s own actions, working effectively with challenging patients, responding effectively to unexpected experiences, talking about difficult issues with sensitivity and objectivity, and delegating to others as needed.

This essential skill should be apparent in every aspect of an individual’s professional interactions. Warmth, facilitative genuineness, empathetic understanding, respect, openness, supportiveness, active listening abilities are among the important attributes that students should demonstrate across the board to achieve a professional demeanor. In addition, successful students will be able to employ these

attributes in communicating confidently and respectfully with patients/clients/families.

(3) The third identified ability is “communication skills.” This is defined as the ability to communicate effectively (i.e., speaking, body language, reading, writing, listening) for varied audiences and purposes.

Some of the behavioral criteria identified for assessing this ability include maintaining eye contact, modifying communication to meet the needs of different audiences, utilizing non-verbal communication to augment verbal messages, and utilizing communication technology effectively.

A student exemplifying this skill should be able to accurately and succinctly describe their assessment and/or treatment plan, either verbally or in writing, and in a way appropriate for the client to the client, family member and/or interprofessional team member and respond appropriately to questions or unexpected responses.

(4) The fourth identified ability is “effective use of time and resources.” This is defined as the ability to obtain the maximum benefit from a minimum investment of time and resources.

Some of the behavioral criteria identified for assessing this ability include focusing on the task at hand without dwelling on past mistakes, setting up your own schedule and coordinating your schedule with others, performing multiple tasks simultaneously and delegating when appropriate, and using scheduled time with each patient efficiently.

Speech language pathologists or audiologists working in any service delivery setting will generally have very specific time requirements which will structure their client contact and interaction. A student should be able to plan each session/procedure to fit in the time allotted and ensure that whatever resources are needed for the session are planned for and organized ahead of time and are appropriate to meet the client’s needs

(5) The fifth identified ability is “use of constructive feedback.” This is defined as the ability to identify sources of and seek out feedback and to effectively use and provide feedback for improving personal interaction.

Some of the behavioral criteria identified for assessing this ability include demonstrating active listening skills, actively seeking feedback, developing a plan of action in response to feedback, and considering multiple approaches when responding to feedback.

Feedback is essential to the learning process. For it to be effective, a student must understand the role feedback plays in their development and be ready to receive and engage it. A student will demonstrate this skill by an ability to separate

professional from personal criticism and use objective data and feedback from multiple sources to modify their behavior and enhance their skills.

(6) The sixth identified ability is “problem-solving.” This is defined as the ability to recognize and define problems, analyze data, develop and implement solutions, and evaluate outcomes.

Some of the behavioral criteria identified for assessing this ability include recognizing problems, prioritizing problems, considering consequences to possible solutions, and evaluating outcomes.

A student demonstrating this skill will be able to draw from their base of knowledge to identify appropriate assessment or treatment strategies for a given situation; efficiently disregard methods that are unlikely to yield positive results; and will use objective measures to document their outcomes/conclusions.

(7) The seventh identified ability is “professionalism.” This is defined as the ability to exhibit appropriate professional conduct and to represent the profession effectively.

Some of the behavioral criteria identified for assessing this ability include demonstrating understanding of the ASHA Code of Ethics and state licensing regulations *, abiding by facility policies and procedures, identifying positive professional role models, and demonstrating accountability for professional decisions.

We all make mistakes. A student exhibiting appropriate professionalism will be able to take responsibility for their mistakes and most importantly, take appropriate steps to remedy them. This may include involving other professionals or removing themselves from a particular patient’s treatment if necessary.

(8) The eighth identified ability is “responsibility.” This is defined as the ability to fulfill commitments and to be accountable for actions and outcomes.

Some of the behavioral criteria identified for assessing this ability include demonstrating dependability, following through on commitments, accepting responsibility for actions and outcomes, and encouraging patient accountability.

A student exhibiting this skill will be timely and prepared for scheduled meetings and appointments and help their patients/clients to understand the importance of these same elements to the success of their ongoing work together.

(9) The ninth identified ability is “critical thinking.” This is defined as the ability to question logically; to identify, generate, and evaluate elements of logical argument; to recognize and differentiate facts, illusions, assumptions, and hidden assumptions; and to distinguish the relevant from the irrelevant.

Some of the behavioral criteria identified for assessing this ability include raising relevant questions, considering all available information, formulating alternative hypotheses, and exhibiting openness to contradictory ideas.

The best assessment or treatment plan may be difficult to design because of unique or specific patient or client needs. A student demonstrating strong critical thinking skills will be able to draw on all information available, assess its usefulness, apply it appropriately in an assessment or treatment setting, and impartially evaluate its effectiveness.

(10) The tenth identified ability is “stress management.” This is defined as the ability to identify sources of stress and to develop effective coping behaviors

Some of the behavioral criteria identified for assessing this ability include recognizing one’s own stressors or problems, recognizing stress or problems in others, maintaining balance between professional and personal life, and responding calmly to urgent situations.

Clinics are often hectic, high-stress environments full of busy professionals and concerned patients. A student effective at understanding and managing their behavior in pressured situations will be able to keep a composed demeanor despite these substantial demands, and recognize and take steps to alleviate anxiety in both their patients and themselves.

While these skills are neither specific nor unique to audiology and speech-language pathology, students who exhibit these 10 generic abilities will likely find greater success in their clinical placements. Consequently, supporting and promoting development of these abilities in your students will likely yield positive results for them as well as their future clients.