

TRANSCRIPT: 5-Stage Model of Adult Skill Acquisition

The Dreyfus model of skill acquisition is used to assess and support adults as they develop and master new skills. The model articulates five distinct stages: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert. Applying this model to the acquisition of clinical skills can help clinical supervisors to recognize how their students are acquiring certain skills so that they can effectively support them to progress to the next stage.

Let's explore each stage as it applies in an audiology or speech language pathology clinical setting.

Novice Stage

In the novice stage, student clinicians have minimal knowledge connected to practice and therefore rely on supervisors to tell them what to do. A student in the novice stage may be inflexible and might try to apply all protocols to different patients even though the needs of each patient might vary. For this reason, novice learners need close support from the clinical educator to develop assessment and management plans and will learn from supervisors who model the skills that they are working to acquire. The clinical educator should provide data and feedback to help the student begin to think about both the technical aspects of their client interaction as well as their behavior and its influence on client outcomes.

Advanced Beginner

As students learn from their clinical supervisors and progress to the Advanced Beginner stage, they are beginning to develop and sequence elements of assessment and management plans, consistent with standards of evidence-based practice. In this stage, students can take a patient record and do the initial planning for treatment. However, supervisors should continue to monitor their decisions and follow-through. A student at this stage may begin to be self-reflective about their own behavior and its relationship to client outcomes, and may feel challenged when their plans do not produce expected results during therapy. Supervisors should begin to see that the students at the Advanced Beginner stage can start to recognize appropriate resources and strategies for patient treatment but should still provide consistent support with decision-making and pre-planning.

Competent

Supervisors can recognize when a student they supervise moves into the Competent stage when they are able to plan deliberately using analytical assessment to treat problems in context and that they are able to accurately assess when treatments are working. They may require consultation for exceptionally complex patients or when

treatments do not work and may need some support in planning to address challenges with specific recommendations. Competent students are able to use standardized and routine procedures in context and can recognize diagnoses and how they “fit” assessment and treatment protocols. In this stage, the student demonstrates an increased understanding of situational dynamics, an awareness of their own behavior in context, and the ability to modify it to enhance client outcomes.

Proficient

When a student has reached the “proficient” stage, they are able to have a holistic understanding of situations and treatments and can plan for potential bumps in the road. They can think broadly, act individually, and are able to design, implement, and modify plans as needed. Proficient students can identify unfamiliar challenges and see how expected events may impact assessment and treatment. While they are likely to be willing to test several solutions independently, they may still require and reach out for consultation and support from their supervisors. At this stage, students will take responsibility for and be able to justify their own decisions regarding treatment.

Expert

Once a student reaches the “Expert” stage, they are able to intuitively and accurately see the big picture regarding client management needs and can make decisions based both on a set of rules and their experience to achieve a specific end goal. They are prepared to go beyond existing assessment and management paradigms to address client needs and will use data to document outcomes. They will also fully engage in self-reflection as a means of sustaining professional and clinical competency.