

An Analysis of the Clinical Reasoning of Experienced And Novice Physiotherapists Using the Dreyfus Model of Skills Acquisition

CATHERINE DOODY

*School Of Physiotherapy
University College Dublin, Mater Hospital, Eccles St, Dublin 7
Ireland*

PURPOSE The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the clinical reasoning of experienced and novice physiotherapists in the context of the Dreyfus model of skills acquisition. (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1980). **RELEVANCE** The Dreyfus model postulates that in the acquisition and development of a skill a student passes through five levels of proficiency, novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient and expert. This model has previously been applied to nursing practice (Benner 1984) but not to physiotherapy. **SUBJECTS** Seven experienced physiotherapists, 7 third year and 7 fourth year Bachelor of Physiotherapy undergraduate students took part in the study. **MATERIALS AND METHODS** Qualitative data collection methods were used in this study. The subjects were observed and audiotaped in an outpatient clinical setting as they assessed and treated a previously unseen patient. These audiotapes were subsequently reviewed with the therapists by means of a semi-structured interview to access the therapists' thoughts. These interviews were also audiotaped, **ANALYSIS** The audiotaped interviews were transcribed and analysed using the Dreyfus model of skills acquisition as a framework to guide the analysis **RESULTS** The experienced therapists demonstrated many characteristics of the 5th 'expert' stage of the Dreyfus model displaying an intuitive grasp of each situation and showing an awareness of what needed to be achieved and how to achieve it. However in some instances of uncertainty, the experienced therapists also displayed characteristics of the models' 4th 'proficient' stage where they were aware of goals but were uncertain as to how to achieve these goals. The year 3 and year 4 students both showed evidence of stage 2 'advanced beginner' recognising meaningful aspects of the clinical situation based on previous experience. In addition the year 3 students demonstrated some attributes of stage 1 'novices' which appeared to be directly linked to lack of clinical practice in specific areas. A number of the year 4 students demonstrated some characteristics of stage 3 'competent', seeing their actions in terms of long term goals and showing conscious deliberate planning. **CONCLUSIONS** The Dreyfus model of skills acquisition provides a useful framework for understanding the clinical reasoning processes of expert and novice physiotherapists and for development of teaching strategies for students. **REFERENCES** Dreyfus SE, Dreyfus HL (1980). A five-stage model of the mental activities involved in directed skill acquisition. Unpublished report supported by the Air Force Office of Scientific Research (AFSC), USAF (Contract F49620-79-0064), University of California at Berkeley. Benner P (1984) From Novice to Expert. Excellence and Power in Clinical Nursing Practice. Addison-Wesley Publishing Co, California.