

Phases of Learning

Three distinct phases of learning a new skill have been identified, and these are:

1. The Cognitive Phase: Identification and development of the component parts of the skill - involves formation of a mental picture of the skill
2. The Associative Phase: Combining each of the component parts into a smooth action - involves practicing the skill and using feedback to perfect the skill
3. The Autonomous Phase: Developing the learned skill so that it becomes automatic - involves little or no conscious thought or attention whilst performing the skill

Here we look at each phase individually and how this knowledge is reflected in the Skill Development Model.

The Cognitive Phase

The Cognitive Phase is vital to the development of good technique. The task for the player is to understand what is required to perform the technique. The player can accomplish this by watching the technique being demonstrated, and having a number of attempts at performing the skill. It is vital that the player pays attention to each part of the skill.

The rate of development during this phase is directly related to the quality with which the skill is taught. The coach should use as many methods of teaching the skill as necessary (Verbal, Demonstration, Video, Diagrams etc) - ensuring that the visual demonstration is of a very high standard is of utmost importance. Once the component parts of the skill have been clearly identified further practice helps assemble them, bit by bit, into the overall skill.

The Associative Phase

Players in the Associative Phase of skill acquisition use feedback, from themselves (i.e. how the skill feels and if the outcome is successful), and from the Coach (identifying where the player is making an error and providing positive corrective feedback) to shape and polish the individual component parts into a smooth action. Rehearsal of the skill must be done regularly and correctly.

Remember, Practice makes Permanent, but only Perfect Practice makes Perfect!

The Autonomous Phase

With further practice the skill may become automatic, i.e. the player can perform the skill without consciously focusing on the whole skill or how it is made up of its component parts. This phase is identified by automatic and consistently correct performance of the skill.

Players should be able to perform the skill to an autonomous level in a stationary position or with limited movement - i.e. in a Basic Drill situation - before progressing to performing it in a more challenging situation, e.g. while moving - as in an Intermediate Drill - or with further external demands - as in an Advanced Drill.

For more information on Basic, Intermediate and Advanced Drills see Technical Drills in the Developing the Skills of Gaelic Games section.

