Pyramid Practices: Stages of Learning

This document provides a brief description of the stages of learning new skills.

Learning New Behaviors

Learning new behaviors requires frequent practice of "doing it the right way." Learners need to know if they are on track as they practice, so we provide immediate positive feedback when they do it the right way. We provide corrective feedback if learners do it the wrong way and provide them more opportunities to do it the right way.

With anything that we teach, **practice** is the activity that moves learners from acquisition of a new skill to fluency, even when teaching behavior. During both teaching and practice, learners need lots of **feedback** in order to ensure that they are doing the skill correctly. We don't want them to practice the new skill incorrectly and become fluent in misbehavior.

Figure 1 shows the Stages of Learning as a progression from acquisition to fluency to maintenance and generalization. Feedback is necessary at each stage to advance to the next.
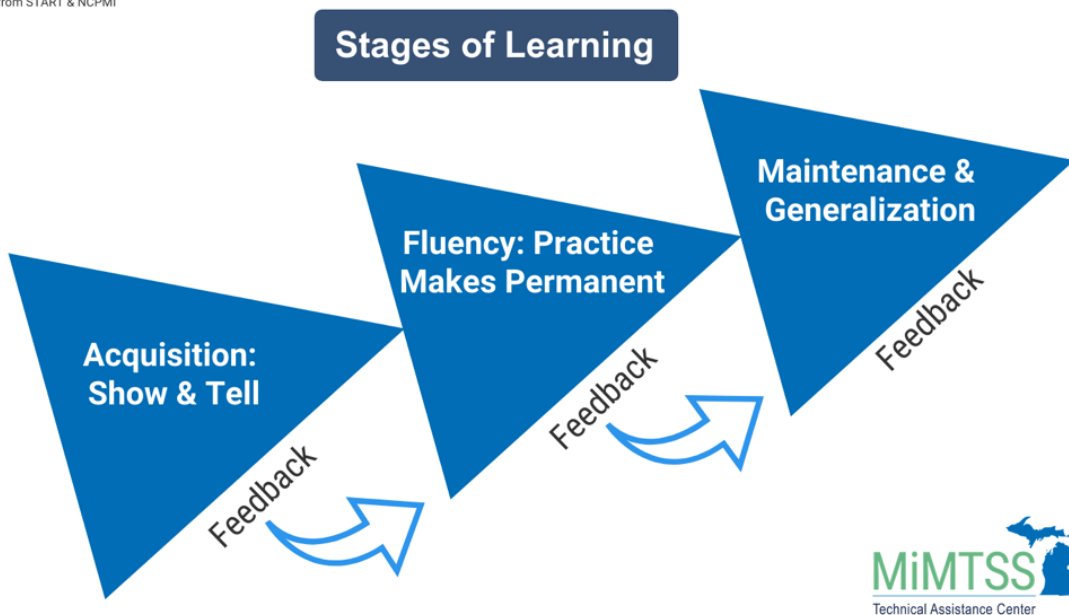

Figure 1. Stages of Learning

Acquisition: Show and Tell

When learners learn how to do something new, they acquire new skills or concepts. To support learner's acquisition of new skills, we need to explain and demonstrate the skill/concept and encourage learners as they attempt to learn the skill.

- Explain concretely
- Demonstrate
- Link to other ideas or concepts
- Provide examples and non-examples
- Encourage learners when learning
- *Warning! The skill can be easily lost at this stage. Encourage, encourage, encourage!

Fluency: Practice Make Permanent

Once learners acquire a new skill, they need to be able to use the skill proficiently or fluently. We need to provide multiple opportunities for them to practice and master the skill/concept, as well as prompt learners to use their new skills in new situations.

- Offer multiple opportunities to practice
- Help learners link the concept or skill to others
- Prompt learners to use the skill or concept in new situations
- Elaborate on the skill or concept

Maintenance and Generalization: You Got It!

Once learners are fluent with their new skills, they need to be able to use the skills (or "maintain" the skills) without support or prompting from an adult. When learners apply their new skills to new situations, people, activities, and settings they demonstrate generalized use of these skills.

- Provide opportunities to use the skill or concept in new situations or with new people
- Provide opportunities within a variety of activities and in new applications
- Comment on learner's ability to maintain the skill and generalize its use