

Human Development Portfolio

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Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as it Relates to Children

Introduction: What follows will be an infographic covering, in relative depth, Maslow's hierarchy of needs with a focus on how it relates specifically to children. While there is a seven-level model, this infographic details the earlier five level model.

The final level of Maslow's hierarchy, fifth level needs relate to feelings of self-actualisation. They include feelings of purpose, living up to one's potential and creativity (Maslow, 1954, p.207-212). The first and only 'growth need', it is rare to spend extended time at the pinnacle of Maslow's hierarchy mode. According to Nishi Tripathi and Moakulma (2018), the majority of people fluctuate between the various levels of the model at different times in their life. Those experiencing periods of self-actualisation report increases in feelings of wellbeing, contentment and optimism (Carrano, 2009, p.242).

The fourth level of Maslow's hierarchy relates to a person's need for esteem, both personally and in social situations. This includes the human need for control, power, respect, feeling of accomplishment and external validation of achievements. Fourth level needs are considered to be the final level of deficit needs and the final hurdle to reaching the pinnacle of the hierarchy and self-actualisation (Maslow, 1999, p.65). A deficit of esteem is felt most sharply in the effect it has on a person's sense of self-confidence and self-worth (National Health Service [NHS], 2023). First it must be understood that personal and social esteem are symbiotic in nature (Harris and Orth, 2019), when one thrives there is a notable increase in the other and when one falters, the other is likely to follow. For example- A child who is the victim of bullying, causing a sense of low social-esteem, becomes withdrawn and downcast, a potential manifestation of low self-esteem. A lack of self-esteem can lead to poor mental health, lack of self-worth, self-destructive behaviours and harmful social behaviours- bullying, for example (Mind, 2022). Research has shown that one's sense of self, including their view of themselves within the world- their sense of esteem- is developed in childhood; therefore, it is essential that adults create an environment in which a child's sense of esteem is free to develop (Newman, no date given).

Maslow determined third level needs to be those associated with feelings of love and belonging or community (Stoyanov, 2017, p. 37). These include the need for affection, kindness, connection and communication. It is well understood that prolonged isolation has damaging effects on a person's psyche (Hawkey and Capitanio, 2015), and even more so on the psyche of a child. However, it need not be total isolation for it to have a profound effect on a child's development. Children who experience a lack of affection or connection, especially with their caregivers, are likely to experience significant difficulties forming close, meaningful relationships later in life (Bowlby, 1997). As such, despite the fact that these needs were historically left out of the discussion (Hanish, 2023), it is now accepted that it is imperative to meet these needs in order that children may develop to their full potential (Lindon and Brodie, 2016, p. 87-107). For some time, it was theorised that this type of need could only be met by the child's parents or ersatz parents, typically a maternal figure, however, with the rise of women working in careers outside of the home, it is now largely accepted that similar benefits can occur when a child forms a 'secure attachment' to their caregivers, including childcare providers (Lindon, 2012, p. 82-90).

The second level of Maslow's hierarchy covers a person's need for safety and security, both physical and psychological (Maslow, 1954, p. 89). These include access to appropriate shelter and healthcare, freedom from domestic violence and larger-scale conflicts, financial stability and equal access to services (UNICEF, no date given). Another low-level need, its affect is most keenly felt in its absence. Assuming that first level needs are still being met, a deficit of second level needs is most damaging to a child's sense of wellbeing. Prolonged periods of stress can have a devastating impact on both physical and mental health (Rasheed, 2016), these effects often last much longer than the situation that caused the initial stress. The consequences of such situations are even more profound when they are experienced by children, who have not yet developed the same perspective nor cognitive skills which allow adults to more easily process these experiences (Thompson, 2014). Additionally, children are unlikely to have access to the same breadth of information and knowledge about what is happening during the event or series of events, which can make situations seem even more frightening and uncontrollable. As a result, children who are raised in environments that lack safety, security and stability are significantly more prone to experiencing mental ill health, homelessness and incarceration at some point during their life when compared to children who were not so unfortunate (Southerland, 2014).

The first level of the hierarchy represents the most basic, physiological needs that motivate human behaviours (Maslow, 1970, p.63). These include air, nutrition, hydration and rest. Maslow considered this, and other lower-level needs, to be a 'deficit' needs, needs that motivate behaviour to avoid the negative consequences caused when they are not adequately met (Wichita State University, no date given). In the case of the first level, a deficit of any one has a common outcome – death, and so they are often referred to as survival needs. Maslow posited early on that failure to meet these needs precludes the possibility of reaching the higher-level needs in his hierarchy, while he later declared this to be inaccurate, it was not without internal logic (Maslow, 1943 & 1970). Modern research agrees that failure to meet the needs outlined in this first level significantly impacts a child's ability to achieve the same level of development, well-being or achievement as a child who has never, or infrequently, known the same deficits (Lee, 2024).

Conclusion: The five level model of Maslow's hierarchy provides succinct explanation of the interdependent nature of human needs, behaviours and achievement, which is especially pertinent when considering child development.

The Concept of Holistic Child Development

Introduction:

The concept of holistic child development is the concept of developing the child as a whole, rather than focusing on one aspect in particular. A concept is defined by Margolis and Laurence (2023) as 'the building blocks of thought' and by the Oxford English Dictionary (2024) as 'an abstract idea'. From these definitions we can infer that a concept is the first step towards an actionable idea. Concepts form in the subconscious initially, before being exposed to conscious thought, and are informed by the individuals experiences, environment and biases. As such, concepts and the interpretation thereof can vary significantly, and child development is no different. This piece intends to assess the thinking of various theorists and their influence on the common understanding of the concept of holistic child development, by examining several aspects considered vital to childcare practice.

Basic Needs:

While much these days is focused on quantifiable metrics, it's imperative that practitioners do not become fixated on measurable development and forget to satisfy a child's basic needs. Maslow posited that unless basic needs are met, it is impossible for a child to develop towards higher, more nebulous needs (Maslow, 1954). These basic needs include ensuring adequate nutrition, hydration and rest. Practitioners have a responsibility to ensure that all children are having their basic needs met consistently whilst they're in their care (Welsh Government, 2023). However, the way in which these needs are met may not need to be focused on the basic need, but a powerful learning experience in its own right. It is possible to incorporate social, emotional, physical and cognitive development into meeting a child's basic needs, which will enable them to develop holistically whilst imparting practical skills (Welsh Government, 2022).

Varied:

In order to support holistic development, it is important that children have access to varied resources, activities and opportunities. Children are typically only able to focus continuously for two to five minutes for each year of age (Lingo Bus, 2018). As such in order that children are able to develop most effectively, it is best practice to vary the type and purpose of the child's activities throughout the day (Queen Margaret's University, 2023), while there is value in repetitive activities,

children will stagnate in their development if not given access to novel experiences. Furthermore, a variety of experiences and activities enables children to develop multiple skills simultaneously, a core tenet of holistic development (Brodie, 2018). Variety is equally important when one is considering the diet of a child, with studies indicating that exposing a child to a variety of tastes and textures during formative years leads to less restrictive eating patterns in later life (Patel, Donovan and Lee, 2020). This not only aids the child in maintaining adequate nutrition, the foundational aspect of Maslow's hierarchy (Maslow 1970, p.63), but will also enable to immerse themselves more fully in other cultures.

Based in Positive Relationships:

According to Bronfenbrenner (1975 & 1979 cited by Sadownik, 2023), positive relationships are vital within the childcare sector, not only with the child but also with the child's parents and other professionals. Within a childcare setting, practitioners in the early years act as caregivers, typically in the absence of the parents or guardians of the child. This means that practitioners have a responsibility to provide a similar level of warmth and attachment that the young child would otherwise be receiving from their parental figures (Seaman and Giles, 2019). It is arguably equally important to maintain a positive relationship with the child's parental figures. It is an oft cited fact that there is no greater expert on a child than themselves and their parents. As such it is essential that practitioners maintain an open, honest and professional relationship with the parents of a child in their care (Duncan, 2023); a lack of trust and communication between caregivers can lead to small details and important information failing to be communicated, which can lead to unnecessary negative outcomes for the child. It is for this same reason that positive, working relationships amongst professionals is vital to ensuring the best possible outcome for all children. There is much legislation that has been written as a result of a breakdown or lack of communication between professional bodies (HM Treasury, 2003 & Department of Education, 2023). Positive relationships provide a firm foundation for a child to be able to approach further opportunities for development with confidence (Antony, 2022), therefore, positive relationships of all kinds are an essential element of holistic child development.

Learning Experiences:

Learning experiences are essential to holistic development as most children absorb more information while actively engaged with a task or activity (Welsh Government, 2023). While academic learning has traditionally been considered an indoor pursuit in western cultures, research suggests that educational outcomes can be improved by moving formal education to outdoor venues (Kuo, Barnes and Jordan, 2019). It is on this premise that forest schools were

founded, in order that children might develop their cognitive and physical abilities and to cultivate an appreciation for the knowledge available in the natural world (Dean, 2019). Regardless of where the learning takes place however, it is imperative that children have regular access to resources for experiential learning (Ionescu, 2021).

Conclusion:

Holistic child development focuses on the development of the whole child and incorporates many aspects, few of which have been covered herein, however at it's core it focus upon providing the child with everything they need to thrive in all areas of their lives. It is an approach that is only possible due to the sharing of information and collaborative work amongst experts and practitioners.

Maslow's Significance in Understanding Child Development

Introduction:

This section will be discussing holistic child development and Maslow's significance in understanding it. This will be done through the exploration of three aspects of day-to-day life in an early years setting.

Three Examples from Professional Practice

Mealtimes:

Maslow's significance in the manner in which mealtimes are handled in settings cannot be understated. If they are handled in a manner which supports holistic development, it is possible to satisfy the first four levels of Maslow's hierarchy (Maslow, 1954). This type of practice would also be in accordance with guidance from the Welsh government (2022). Research shows that mealtimes can become not just periods set aside to satisfy a child's first level need of adequate nutrition but also satisfy their second, third and fourth level needs as well.

A child's need for safety can be satisfied during mealtimes by ensuring that appropriate safety measures are taken to ensure that the children are properly supervised by staff familiar with anti-choking techniques (Welsh Government, 2023), and that proper hygiene and safety practices are observed in the kitchen, thereby reducing any risk of illness resulting from food preparation. These measures, while perhaps not immediately apparent to the children, ensure that the children feel that the food they are consuming in our care and their consumption of it is able to be enjoyed without fear.

Mealtimes can also be important to a child's sense of belonging, making the child feel loved and accepted. Settings and practitioners can achieve this by ensuring that the foods served to mealtimes are reflective of the diversity within the setting and other cultures globally (Welsh Government, 2022). Not only does this enhance a child's sense of belonging but has been proven to reduce picky eating (Patel, Donovan and Lee, 2020). Practitioners are able to satisfy a child's fourth level need for control during mealtimes also. Offering choices during meals supports a child in their development of their sense of self, as well as supporting the child's right to a voice (Montessori, 1966, 2007a and 2007b cited by Isaacs, 2018, p. 82).

Structured Activities:

Structured activities play an important role in supporting a child's holistic development. They provide children with opportunities for creativity, experiential learning, learning positive social behaviours and measurable achievement (Welsh Government, 2022). It is important that practitioners consider carefully the developmental stage, needs and preferences of the children in their care whilst planning structured activity. This gives the children the best possible chance of success and feeling the sense of achievement that follows.

Structured activities in early years settings typically fall into one of two categories based on their primary purpose: creative expression or exploration. Activities based around creative expression, colloquially arts and crafts, caters to the fourth and fifth level needs of a child (Maslow, 1954). Giving children opportunities to express themselves in non-verbal ways also supports their development of their sense of self, allowing them to express aspects of themselves they may not have the verbal capacity for (Huckleberry Daycare, 2024). Explorative activities are perhaps the broadest category, encompassing outdoor excursions such as field trips, scientific activities and access to materials only suitable under supervision amongst others. While initially seeming unconnected, each of these are linked by the common theme of introducing new or novel experiences and resources which allow children to learn about the world (Legare, 2014). Outdoor excursions give children the opportunity to explore the wider world, to explore their local area and notable places further afield (Kennedy, 2015). Scientific exploration provides a foundational basis for more in depth understanding of the 'why?' of things, it allows children to explore concepts such as cause and effect, in addition to encouraging their ongoing curiosity about the world (Campbell *et al.*, 2018). Access to materials that are only safe under close supervision, such as basic tools, lengths of rope, and cooking equipment, allows children to learn how to safely handle and use these items. This increases a child's sense of independence and reduces the risk of accidental injury in the future (Sando, Kleppe and Sanseter, 2021).

Free Play:

Free play serves an important role in the pursuit of holistic child development and provides opportunities to satisfy all levels in Maslow's hierarchy (Maslow, 1954). Free play should allow children the freedom of choice between several options, to allow the child the opportunity to explore their own interests in a way that is not always possible with structured activities (Bruce, 2001, p. 117). In fact, play is recognised as so intrinsic to optimal child development that it is enshrined with in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, no date given).

Free play, by its nature, is difficult to define, in terms of what it looks like. However, the research strongly suggests that play, regardless of how it appears to outside observers, is a powerful vehicle for education (Welsh Government, 2022). Correctly handled, free play allows for many different types of play; imaginative play, construction play and active play amongst others. Imaginative play allows for children to act out recent experiences and future opportunities (Spivey, 2024). It allows children to process emotions through acting out the situation that caused them in a safe, slightly distanced way. Construction play, for example constructing towers out of blocks, is an almost universal form of play (Parry, 2019). It allows children to develop their fine motor skills and understanding of basic physics concepts (Journey Early Learning, 2024). Active play involves larger amounts of physical activity than is inherent to construction or pretend play and so is vital to a child's physical development (National Health Service, 2022). Not only does active play help to develop the child's fine and gross motor skills, but it helps to ensure healthy bone development, lowers the risk of obesity and boosts overall emotional wellbeing (Archer, 2014).

Conclusion:

There are many aspects of day-to-day life in an early years setting in which the influence Maslow's hierarchy of needs is obvious, even more so when one considers the effect that Maslow's thinking has had on other theorists.

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Declaration

I have not used generative AI.