

Human development- cover page

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I did not use AI throughout this assignment.

Part one-infographic, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs



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Part two- The Concept of Holistic Child Development

“Holistic” refers to an approach that considers the whole system or person, integrating all parts and dimensions (physical, emotional and social) to promote overall well-being and balance. (Oxford languages, 1926). A concept is an abstract idea or general notion that helps organise and categorise knowledge, serving as a foundation or understanding complex phenomena (Collins, 2011). Holistic child development, as a concept, integrates multiple aspects of a child’s growth. From birth, a child’s development is not segmented into isolated phases but occurs simultaneously across various domains. Holistic child development emphasises the interconnectedness of all areas of learning, growth and improvement (Brodie, 2018). For instance, language acquisition and cognitive development are closely linked, with each supporting the growth of the other (David et al., 2003).

To grasp the idea of holistic child development, it's essential to recognise the role of positive relationships. Traditionally, social development has been linked primarily with older children. however, a growing body of research is now recognising that even very young infants display social behaviours. As children’s social abilities progress, they begin to test boundaries and experiment with different behaviours. While this can present challenges for adults, it is often an intensely emotional experience for the children themselves (Brodie, 2018). Strong positive relationships are fundamental to holistic child development, as they significantly influence a child’s social, emotional and cognitive growth. Attachment theory, developed by Bowlby (1969), emphasises that secure attachments with caregivers form the cornerstone of a child’s emotional and social well-being. These early emotional bonds foster a sense of security, providing a stable base from which children can explore the world, develop social skills, and build resilience. Peer interactions, family dynamics, and teacher student relationships also pay a vital role in fostering emotional and social development. Vygotsky’s (1978) social learning theory suggests that children learn best through social interactions, where they observe and internalise the values and behaviours of those around them. Positive peer relationships encourage empathy, collaboration, and conflict resolution while supportive family environments co tribute to a child’s sense of belonging and self-worth

Practitioners must also factor in the role of play when examining holistic child development. Play is an essential component of holistic child development, facilitating cognitive, emotional, social and physical growth. Vygotsky (1978) emphasised the importance of play in cognitive development, arguing that activities just beyond their current abilities with guidance. Through free play and exploration, children develop problem solving skills, critical thinking and creativity, which are integral to intellectual growth. Play also provides opportunities for children to experiment, take risks, and express themselves in ways that foster emotional resilience and social competence. (Piaget, 1962). Imaginative play in particular is vital for social and emotional development. It allows children to explore different roles, practice empathy and understand diverse perspectives, as highlighted by Elkind (2007). Additionally, physical activity during play supports the development of both fine and gross motor skills, contributing to overall physical health and coordination (Ginsburg, 2007). Peer collaboration during play helps children develop communication skills and learn the dynamics of cooperation, negotiation and conflict resolution. Through play, children gain a sense of agency and autonomy, learning to navigate the world around them in a hands on, experimental manner. This promotes not only intellectual development but also a well-rounded sense of self. In this way, play supports key developmental milestones and equips children with skills necessary for success in life.

Holistic child development highlights the essential role of both physical and mental health in fostering a child’s overall well-being. Proper nutrition, regular exercise, adequate sleep and access to healthcare are fundamental to a child’s physical health and their ability to engage with the world around them. According to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory, the child’s environment, including healthcare access, plays a significant role in shaping their development. A well-balanced diet provides the necessary nutrients for brain development and physical growth, while exercise contributes to the development of motor skills and the release of endorphins, which enhance mood and cognitive function. Furthermore, sufficient rest is crucial for emotional regulation and learning, as it allows the brain to consolidate memories and process information (Walker, 2017). Mental heath is equally vital, as it impacts emotional regulation, behaviour and interpersonal relationships. The ability to manage emotions effectively, as described in the work of Goleman (1995) on emotional intelligence, contributes to improved social skills and overall mental wellbeing. Positive mental health enables children to cope with challenges, build resilience, and thrive in both academic and social environments. Promoting self-care habits form an early age, such as healthy sleep routines and stress management techniques, equips children with the tools to manage their well-being throughout life. Thus, ensuring a balance of both physical and mental health is essential for supporting children in reaching their full potential (Shonkoff et al., 2012).

When exploring the concept of holistic child development, practitioners must also take safety into account. A child’s sense of safety, both physical and emotional, is fundamental to their healthy development. Bowlby’s (1969) attachment theory highlights the importance of secure attachment to caregivers, which fosters emotional security and trust. When children feel physically safe, free from harm, and emotionally supported, they are more likely to explore their surrounding and engage in learning. Vygotsky (1978) emphasised that a safe, secure environment provides the foundation for cognitive and social development, as children can take risks and experiment without fear. Emotional security, such as a nurturing and non-judgmental environment, encourages children to regulate their emotions and build resilience (Goleman, 1995). The presence of consistent boundaries, as discussed by skinner (1953), helps children understand expectations and provides a structure that reinforces

feelings of safety and stability. Moreover, a secure environment protects children from excessive stress, which can have detrimental effects on their development (Shonkoff et al., 2012). Hence, ensuring both physical safety and emotional security is crucial for developing trust, regulating emotions, building self-confidence, and supporting overall well-being, all of which empower children to realise their full capabilities.

In conclusion, holistic child development is a comprehensive approach that acknowledges the interconnection of physical, emotional, cognitive and social dimensions of a child's growth. As emphasised by Brodie (2018) and supported by theorists such as Bowlby (1969) and Vygotsky (1978), a secure environment, positive relationships and play are essential for fostering development across all areas. Physical and mental well-being, as outlined by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Goleman (1995), are integral to ensuring children reach their full potential. The emphasis on safety, emotional security, and nurturing environments underscores the importance of providing children with the stability and support they need to thrive. By promoting balanced development, children gain a strong foundation for lifelong learning, social skill, and emotional resilience.

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Part three- Maslow’s significance in understanding child development

Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs remains pivotal in understanding child development, offering a comprehensive framework that links basic physiological and safety needs to higher level psychological and self-actualisation needs. By highlighting how unmet foundational needs impact growth and potential, his model underscores the interplay between motivation and developmental stages, particularly within dynamic environments. Contemporary research reinforces Maslow’s relevance, demonstrating the adaptability of his theories to modern educational and caregiving contexts, where environmental and relational factors significantly shape outcomes (Havard, 2024). Shonkoff (2023), underscores how the timing of environmental influences profoundly affects children’s biological and cognitive development, supporting Maslow’s concept of hierarchical interdependencies. This connection illustrates how critical early support is to ensure a child’s ability to advance through Maslow’s hierarchy toward maximising individual capabilities.

Transitions in early years practice are crucial for fostering security and attachment, which are foundational elements of child development. Disruptions to attachment relationships during transitions such as starting nursery or moving between settings, can impede a child’s sense of safety, which Maslow’s hierarchy of needs identifies as a requirement for achieving high-order cognitive and social development (Maslow, 1943). Adults play a vital role in these periods by supporting the child’s emotional well-being, offering continuity of care, and gradually introducing changes. Strategies such as staggered admissions, home visits, and assigning a consistent key worker help to build trust and alleviate anxiety for both children and parents (Birth to Five Matters, no date). Theorists such as Bowlby (1988), emphasised the significance of secure attachments in early development, underscoring the importance of nurturing relationships during transitions. In Wales, policies including flying start and the healthy child Wales programme promote holistic, child centred approaches, emphasising multi-agency collaboration to address children’s physical, emotional, and social needs (Welsh Government, 2021). These programs recognise the integral role of parents in fostering a sense of belonging, advocating for consistent communication and support throughout transitional phases (Senedd Research, 2020). Additionally, the curriculum for Wales incorporates a play-based, trauma-informed approach, ensuring the child’s well-being is prioritised as part of their learning journey (Welsh Government, 2021). This collaborative focus on the child as a whole acknowledges the importance of family dynamics, cultural context and individual needs, ensuring smoother transitions and better developmental outcomes.

Divorce and housing instability significantly impact early years practice, presenting challenges to foundational needs described in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1943) identified safety, security, and belonging as prerequisites for higher-order functions such as learning and self-actualisation. Housing instability, often resulting from divorce, disrupts these needs, exposing children to stress, developmental delays, and emotional difficulties. Adults in early years settings are instrumental in addressing these issues by fostering a secure and consistent environment. Trauma informed approaches, characterised by predictable routines and empathetic care, help mitigate the effects of instability (Birth to Five Matters, 2021). Collaborative work with parents is essential, enabling practitioners to address the unique challenges faced by children during periods of transition. Welsh policy frameworks, such as the early years outcomes framework, stress the importance of holistic support, ensuring children feel safe, valued, and resilient while upholding their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child (Welsh Government, 2021). Further, initiatives like flying start provide targeted support to disadvantaged families, addressing inequalities through early learning opportunities and parental engagement (Senedd Research, 2020). Housing stability, a critical factor in this equation, is supported by Welsh Government’s ongoing exploration of a legal right to adequate housing, as advocated by Shelter Cymru (Shelter Cymru, 2021). These integrated approaches underscore the necessity of aligning systemic policy with early years practice to secure positive outcomes for children and families in challenging circumstances.

Poverty and inadequate access to nutritious food present significant challenges in early years practise directly influencing a child's developmental outcomes. According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs physiological necessities, including food, are foundational for achieving higher levels of cognitive and emotional development. A lack of proper nutrition can impede a child’s ability to concentrate, learn, and engage socially, creating barriers to reaching their full potential (Care Learning, 2024). Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory complements this perspective by highlighting how interconnected systems, such as a family and community, affect a child’s development. Poor housing and food insecurity often stem from systematic inequities that require holistic, multi-level interventions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this context, early years practitioners play a vital role in addressing these challenges. They provide not only sustenance through initiatives like free meals but also a nurturing environment that promotes security and emotional well-being. Warm, consistent relationships between educators and children help fulfil the need for love and belonging, a critical step in Maslow’s framework, which build the foundation for confidence and esteem (Care Learning, 2024). Additionally, engaging with parents ensures that the home environment supports the child’s nutritional and emotional needs. Policies in Wales such as the early years pupil development grant, aim to mitigate the effects of poverty by allocating funds for tailored interventions, including language development and emotional well-being support. However, challenges remain, particularly in ensuring equitable resource distribution across settings (Estyn, 2024). The healthy eating in schools (Wales) Measure 2009 complements this by promoting balanced diets in educational settings, supporting a whole-child approach to development (Public Health Wales, no date). A collaborative approach involving schools, local

authorities, and families is essential (Estyn, 2024). Such strategies create an inclusive environment where children from disadvantaged backgrounds can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally (Public Health Wales, no date).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is pivotal in early years practice as it highlights the foundational importance of meeting physiological, and safety needs to enable children to achieve higher levels of cognitive and emotional development (Maslow, 1943). It provides a framework for understanding how unmet needs affect growth and potential, emphasising motivation's role in development. Shonkoff (2023) reinforce its relevance in shaping child-centred educational approaches.

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