

Human Development – ECEY4001

Part 1-

I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in the research and creation of this assignment. I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work. I confirm I have copies of notes and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

Self-actualisation, positioned at the apex of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy, refers to a child's capacity to realise their potential, creativity, and motivations. Although often associated with adulthood, children also demonstrate early forms of self-actualising behaviour through curiosity, imaginative play, problem-solving, and the pursuit of personally meaningful interests. These tendencies emerge most strongly when their foundational needs, physiological, safety, belonging, and esteem, are reliably met, creating the psychological freedom necessary for exploration and independent thought (Berk, 2018). Supportive environments that encourage autonomy, nurture creativity, and allow children to take intellectual and emotional risks foster the development of self-directed learning and resilience. Although, restrictive or overly controlling contexts can inhibit intrinsic motivation and limit opportunities for self-expression (Rogoff, 2003). Therefore, self-actualisation in childhood is not a fixed end state but an ongoing developmental process moulded by secure relationships, opportunities, and a culture that values individual growth.

Children's ego needs, within Maslow's (1943) esteem tier, includes the development of confidence, competence, autonomy, and a sense of self-worth. These needs become increasingly significant as children begin to evaluate their abilities in relation to others and take in feedback from caregivers, teachers, and peers. When adults provide consistent encouragement, achievable challenges, and recognition of effort, children develop a secure sense of ability and positive self-esteem (Berk, 2018). This support strengthens motivation, resilience, and willingness to engage in learning and social interactions. However, environments characterised by criticism, unrealistic expectations, or limited opportunities can undermine children's feelings of capability, leading to withdrawal, frustration, or avoidance of challenges (Harter, 2015). Meeting ego needs therefore plays a crucial role in holistic development, enabling children to internalise a stable, confident self-concept and progress toward higher-level developmental tasks, including self-direction, emotional regulation, and eventual self-actualisation.

Children's social needs, situated within Maslow's (1943) belongingness and love tier, are central to healthy holistic development. These needs encompass secure relationships with caregivers, positive interactions, and a sense of inclusion within community and cultural groups. When children experience consistent emotional warmth, acceptance, and opportunities for social engagement, they develop stronger socio-emotional competencies, including empathy, cooperation, and self-regulation (Denham, Bassett & Wyatt, 2012). Meeting social needs also fosters internal security, enabling children to explore, learn, and participate confidently in wider social contexts. Nevertheless, when belongingness needs are unmet usually through isolation, inconsistent caregiving, or disrupted peer networks, children may struggle with emotional expression, behavioural regulation, and the formation of stable identity structures (Berk, 2018).

A child's safety needs, positioned just above physiological needs in Maslow's hierarchy, are essential for stable development. Safety encompasses physical protection, predictable and consistent routines, and emotional security, all of which provide the foundation for children to explore and learn confidently (Maslow, 1943). Consistent caregiving, secure attachments, and stable environments reduce anxiety and enable children to regulate emotions effectively (Bowlby, 1988). When safety is compromised, through instability, conflict, or inconsistent care, children may become hypervigilant, delaying cognitive engagement and social development. Therefore, meeting safety needs is crucial, as it allows developmental energy to shift from basic survival toward higher learning, confidence, and autonomy (Berk, 2018). Meeting safety needs therefore enables children to progress toward higher-level developmental tasks such as problem-solving, self-esteem, and autonomy, by ensuring that their foundational sense of security remains intact (Maslow, 1943).

Psychological needs are at the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy of needs which means it's the basic needs of the child. Psychological needs include the air they need to breathe, food, water and health. The basic needs form the core of their emotional and social development, shaping how they understand themselves and relate to others. Within Maslow's (1943) hierarchy, these needs include belongingness, love, and esteem which are the foundations that enable healthy identity formation. Belongingness and love needs are fulfilled when children experience consistent emotional warmth, secure attachment, and inclusion within family and peer groups. Sensitive and responsive caregiving supports emotional regulation, resilience, and positive social functioning (Bowlby, 1988; Ainsworth, 1979). When these relational needs are unmet, children may develop anxiety, distrust, or behavioural difficulties that affect later development. Overall, psychological needs form the bridge between basic safety and higher cognitive or moral development. When these needs are reliably met, children are more capable of engaging in exploration, learning, forming stable identities, and progressing toward self-actualisation (Berk, 2018).

Part 2-

Children's holistic development is shaped not only by chronological age but by the maturity gained through their cultural, historical, and social experiences. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) highlights that children progress towards higher development only when their physiological, safety, belonging, and esteem needs are consistently met. Historical instability, cultural expectations surrounding independence, and the disruptions caused by COVID-19 have influenced how these needs are fulfilled. These factors affect children's emotional security, socialisation, and cognitive growth, demonstrating that maturity is not simply age related but shaped by the contexts supporting or limiting their foundational needs.

COVID-19 restrictions interrupted the social and educational environments that support children's holistic development. Peer interaction is crucial for building emotional understanding, empathy and social maturity (Denham et al., 2012) which was significantly reduced during the pandemic. As a result, many children demonstrated behaviours more typical of younger developmental stages, including heightened anxiety and attachment to parents or caregivers, difficulty sharing, and reduced confidence in group settings. Academic maturation was similarly affected, with remote learning which limited hands on experiences and social opportunities which are essential for cognitive growth (Kuhfeld et al., 2022).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943) provides a useful framework for understanding the effects COVID-19 had on many children. Many children experienced disruptions in their physiological and safety needs such as stable and consistent routines, food security, and emotional safety which could be due to family stress, economic instability and health concerns. When these foundational needs are unmet, progression toward the higher level of needs such as belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualisation is held back. This helps explain why children's maturity appeared delayed relative to their age, their developmental energy was focused on coping rather than growth.

Attachment relationships were also affected during and after the pandemic. Increased parental stress reduced emotional availability, influencing children's emotional security and delaying the development of independence and self-regulation (Pallini et al., 2018). COVID-19 had significant effects on children's attachment to parents, influencing broader developmental outcomes. Prolonged periods at home increased opportunities for closeness and responsive caregiving, strengthening secure attachment for some children. Secure attachment is associated with emotional regulation, resilience, and social competence (Bowlby, 1988). However, for families experiencing stress, financial strain, or mental-health challenges, the pandemic heightened parental unavailability and emotional withdrawal, conditions linked to insecure attachment patterns (Cluver et al., 2020).

Disruptions to childcare, routines, and wider support systems further limited children's opportunities to form relationships beyond the home, shaping social, emotional, and cognitive development during a critical period. Together, these factors illustrate how COVID-19 shaped holistic development in ways that separated maturity from chronological age.

Historical events and societal changes have always shaped the relationship between a child's chronological age and their level of maturity. Understanding that age is fixed and maturity is shaped by a myriad of social factors is vital for recognising how historical contexts influence children's holistic development. Hierarchy of Needs provides a useful framework, illustrating that children's ability to develop higher-order skills depends on the stability of their foundational needs across time (Maslow, 1943; Aries, 1962; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rogoff, 2003).

Throughout history, periods of social changes such as wars, economic depressions, and industrialisation, have often accelerated or disrupted children's maturity. For example, during the Second World War, many children developed heightened independence and emotional resilience due to separation from parents and increased family responsibilities (Dinter, 2017). Although these experiences appeared to "mature" children beyond their years, research suggests that such rapid maturity often coexisted with unmet emotional needs, affecting long-term wellbeing (Bowlby, 1988).

Children involved in historical labour roles, such as chimney sweeping in the 18th and 19th centuries, often developed forms of premature maturity due to harsh working conditions and adult responsibilities imposed at a young age. Despite their chronological age, these children were expected to navigate danger, discipline, and economic pressure, which disrupted typical emotional and cognitive development (Humphries, 2010). Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs helps explain this distortion, as basic safety, security, and belonging were frequently unmet, limiting opportunities for higher-level developmental growth. Consequently, child labour shaped maturity through survival-driven adaptation rather than healthy developmental progression.

Alternatively, historical periods in which society was stable and educational opportunities were improved, have tended to support more age-appropriate maturity by providing consistent opportunities for socialisation, cognitive stimulation, and secure relationships (Aries, 1962; Rogoff, 2003). These conditions align with Maslow's lower-level needs which are safety, belonging, and esteem, allowing children to progress toward the higher stages of cognitive development and emotional autonomy. Therefore, history shapes children's holistic development not through the passage of time, but through the quality of experiences available to them. When historical conditions undermine basic needs, maturity slows or becomes uneven; when they support safety and belonging, maturity aligns more naturally with chronological age (Bronfenbrenner U, 1979).

Understanding how children develop maturity relative to age requires consideration of the cultural contexts in which they grow. While chronological age is universal, expectations of maturity vary widely across societies (Whiting, B.B. & Whiting,

J.W,1975). A child's holistic development including cognitive, social, emotional, and physical is deeply shaped by cultural norms, values, and caregiving practices. Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs is useful as cultures differ in how they prioritise and fulfil children's basic and psychological needs.

In collectivist cultures, such as those in East Asia or parts of Africa, children are often expected to demonstrate interdependence, responsibility, and emotional self-regulation from an early age (Nsamenang, 2006). These expectations can lead to earlier development of social maturity and prosocial behaviours, supported by strong family networks that meet children's needs for belonging and security are key components of Maslow's lower levels. By comparison, autonomy and individual expression may be emphasised less during early childhood.

In more individualistic cultures, including many Western societies, maturity is often equated with independence, self-expression, and decision-making skills (Rogoff, 2003). Children may gain cognitive autonomy earlier but develop communal responsibility more gradually. These cultural values influence how esteem and self-actualisation needs are nurtured, shaping children's internal motivations and identity development (Whiting, B.B. & Whiting, J.W,1975).

Importantly, what is considered "mature" behaviour varies between cultural contexts. Holistic development progresses optimally when a child's cultural environment supports consistent caregiving, emotional security, and opportunities to learn within accepted social frameworks (Super, C.M. & Harkness, S.,1986). As a result, cultural variation highlights that maturity is not a fixed trait, but a culturally informed developmental pathway shaped by how foundational needs are met.

Age and maturity in children are shaped not only by biological development but by the conditions in which they grow. Historical events, cultural expectations, and the disruptions caused by COVID-19 have each influenced how children's foundational needs are met, shaping their emotional, social, and cognitive development. When viewed through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, these factors highlight that maturity emerges most effectively when safety, belonging, and stability are secured. Variations in caregiving, socialisation, and educational experiences demonstrate that maturity is a context-dependent process, and children's holistic development relies on environments that consistently support their evolving needs Shonkoff, J. P., & Phillips, D. A. (Eds.). (2000).

Part 3-

Reflection on Learning Difficulties

Supporting a child with learning difficulties highlighted the importance of adapting practice to meet individual developmental needs. During a literacy activity, the child appeared increasingly frustrated when attempting to decode simple words, displaying avoidance behaviours and reduced engagement. Snowling and Hulme (2012) emphasise that learning difficulties, particularly language and literacy difficulties, are rooted in underlying cognitive and linguistic weaknesses, not simply a lack of exposure or effort. This child often finds it difficult to concentrate for long periods of time and often loses focus in a task. Gathercole and Alloway (2008) emphasise that working memory limitations are a core underlying factor in many learning difficulties. Their central argument is that children with poor working memory struggle to hold and manipulate information long enough to complete learning tasks, which in turn affects progress across multiple areas of development. Initially, I provided repeated verbal prompts, but a self-reflection revealed that this approach can increase pressure and reduce the child's sense of autonomy. Its effectiveness varies with the child's mood, making it hard to decide when it should be implemented. According to (Vygotsky's,1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, learning is most effective when support aligns with a child's current capabilities. Adjusting my strategy, I introduced visual scaffolds, chunked tasks into manageable steps, and offered specific praise to strengthen confidence which is an approach aligned with Maslow's (1943) esteem needs, which underpin motivation and persistence. To promote sustained focus and perseverance, I also included short breaks at various points in the activity supporting their psychological needs as outlined in Maslow's hierarchy. From this experience I noticed that implementing coping strategies such as emotional co-regulation, the use of timed breaks, and multisensory learning tools further reduced anxiety and improved participation. These strategies enhance self-efficacy and reduce cognitive overload for children with additional needs (Berk, 2018). Reflecting on this experience reinforced the value of responsive, child-centred practice and the need to create emotionally secure learning environments that promote resilience, engagement, and sustained progress.

Reflection on Emotional Regulation

Supporting a child with emotional regulation difficulties provided valuable insight into the importance of responsive practice. During a group activity, the child became

overwhelmed when focus was lost during the activity, displaying signs of distress such as withdrawal and irritability. Initially, I attempted to reassure them verbally, but reflection revealed that this approach offered too much cognitive input at a time when the child needed sensory grounding rather than explanation. According to co-regulation theory, children learn to manage strong emotions through supportive interactions with calm, attentive adults (Cole et al., 2013). Shifting my strategy, I lowered my voice, reduced verbal demands, and offered a quiet space with sensory tools, enabling the child to regain emotional stability. I tend to withhold attention during moments of heightened distress, giving the child the opportunity to calm without additional stimulation. Reflecting on my practice, I have recognised that this approach is effective because it avoids escalation and fuelling the overstimulation and enables the child to self-regulate more successfully. These approaches align with Maslow's (1943) lower-level needs for safety and emotional security, which form the foundation for higher learning and social engagement. Implementing coping strategies such as predictable routines, breathing exercises, and space to self-regulate further reduced emotional overload and supported the child's regulation over time. This experience reinforced the need for practitioners to create emotionally safe environments that validate children's feelings, minimise triggers, and promote resilience. It highlighted that emotional regulation is not simply a behavioural issue, but a developmental skill shaped by relationships, environment, and supportive practice (Berk, 2018).

Reflection on English Additional Language (EAL)

Working with a child who had English as an Additional Language (EAL) highlighted the importance of culturally responsive and linguistically sensitive practice. During a guided reading activity, the child appeared hesitant to participate, relying heavily on gestures and observing peers before attempting to contribute. Initially, I asked direct questions, but reflection revealed that this increased pressure and limited the child's confidence. According to Cummins' (2001) distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), children may appear verbally capable in everyday conversation yet still struggle with academic language demands. Conteh (2012) explains that conversational fluency can develop relatively quickly, but academic language proficiency may take up to 5–7 years. Teachers must recognise that EAL learners may appear verbally confident while still needing support with academic vocabulary and linguistic structures. Recognising this, I adjusted my approach by incorporating visual aids, modelling key vocabulary, and offering opportunities for non-verbal responses. I altered the activity for this child and try to provide 1:1 support to help the child thrive. These strategies align with Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on scaffolding, enabling the child to build language skills within their Zone of Proximal Development. Ensuring emotional security which is consistent with Maslow's (1943) belonging and esteem needs, also proved essential in fostering participation. Additionally, pairing the child with a supportive peer and integrating familiar cultural references helped reduce anxiety and encouraged engagement. The child's peer speak the same language at home so they were able to communicate and translate things for a greater understanding.

This experience reinforced the value of inclusive, differentiated pedagogy and demonstrated that effective support for EAL learners requires sensitivity to linguistic load, cultural identity, and the need for gradual, scaffolded exposure to new language forms.

Conclusion on reflections

Supporting a variety of needs within the classroom requires responsive, reflective, and research-informed practice that recognises each child's unique developmental profile. The reflections on learning difficulties, emotional regulation challenges, and English as an Additional Language (EAL) illustrate that effective support is rooted in understanding how cognitive, emotional, and linguistic needs intersect. Approaches grounded in Vygotsky's (1978) principles of scaffolding demonstrate the importance of tailoring support to each child's Zone of Proximal Development, while Maslow's (1943) hierarchy highlights the foundational role of safety, belonging, and esteem in enabling meaningful learning. Whether providing structured breaks, co-regulating emotions, or reducing linguistic load, each strategy reinforces that inclusive pedagogy depends on responsiveness to the child's needs and the creation of emotionally secure environments. Ultimately, fostering holistic development requires practitioners to adapt flexibly, reflect critically, and build on children's strengths, ensuring that all learners can access the curriculum and thrive within the classroom community (Berk, 2018).

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