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Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow was an American psychologist who developed the concept of *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* in 1943. His previous work inspired him to explore three key areas of development: emotional, social and physiological needs. With these in mind, he created a five-tiered pyramid to demonstrate how these vital needs connect and how they are essential to academic achievement. Maslow proposed that each level of needs, starting from the bottom, must be reached fully before progressing to the next. His theory suggests that in order for people to reach their full potential, they must first achieve their basic needs (Johnston *et al*., 2018, pp. 36-37).

The final stage of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is self-actualisation. Self-actualisation allows a person to try and reach their full potential and encourage them to realise what they are capable of. Self-actualisation can only be accomplished when all the other needs below have been achieved. In the UK there are systems in place, such as the NHS and education system, which aim to provide opportunities for individuals "to thrive and flourish." Although, just having the opportunity to do something does not guarantee someone the ability to use it. Barriers, such as poverty or lack of support, can stop a person from fully accessing and benefiting from these opportunities, which then prevents them from self-actualisation. Therefore, this is especially significant for children, as their experiences and opportunities from a young age will shape how they develop and their future. (Mukherji and Dryden, 2014). This definition is similar to that found in (Weinberg, 2012), who writes that people who reach self-actualisation have "psychological health". Meaning that they have achieved their other needs on the hierarchy and can now live life fully as their authentic self, focusing on their purpose and potential and be a "fully mature human". Psychological freedom. A person who has reached self-actualisation is very appreciative of life, they find beauty and joy in the world around them and their love and appreciation are everlasting. To them, every day is as exciting and breathtaking as the last.

After the physiological, safety and love needs have been met, the next is esteem. According to Huitt (2007) a person who has reached this level of the hierarchy will want to earn respect and recognition from others, as well as be skilled, show their competence and achieve their goals. Esteem is very important in the hierarchy of needs because if a child achieves their goal or is successful it makes them proud, confident and builds up their self-worth. This then encourages their personal growth and development. If a child's hierarchy needs have not been met this can have a negative impact on their self-esteem. The child may be seen as "attention seeking" but really, they are just looking for validation, to be accepted and feel safe (Bowen, 2021).

Once the safety and physiological needs have been reached, the next need that will arise in the hierarchy is love, belonginess and affection. Stoyanov (2017) highlights that love is a significant need and that a person who feels loved is more likely to contribute positively to society than someone who does not feel loved. An individual's need for love, affection, and belonging is essential. Maslow (1943) notes that because of this, a person will desire a caring relationship with others, for example, seek a sense of belonging within a group. They will also put a lot of effort in to reach this aim. If someone has reached this need they will now feel, more than ever before, the lack of friends, partner or spouse, or a child. The rejection of love, belonging and affection can have a significant impact on a person, and it can be a big influence in their antisocial behaviour or their lack of moral values.

If the physiological needs are fulfilled, the second need that must be met is based around safety and security. Safety needs relate to a secure and stable environment, whether that be at home, at school or in the community. An example of this would be, if a child is experiencing challenges at home, such as parental conflict, parental substance abuse, neglect or even living in a dangerous area. That child may then struggle to concentrate on their learning due to the lack of security at home. Similarly, a child who feels unsafe at school, whether that be because of a bully or a negative relationship with a teacher, they may also find it difficult to focus on work as their main concern is safety. Children feel safe when they have a predictable and structured environment, as the consistent routines provide them with reassurance. Whereas if a child does not have these, and has disruptions or uncertainty in their routine, it can cause anxiety and insecurity, which ultimately leads to underperforming in their learning (Burleson and Thoron 2014).

The first need that has to be met before an individual is able to progress upwards is physiological/physical. This includes simple necessities that are required for a person to survive, such as, sleeping, breathing, eating and drinking. These needs are fundamental to life and survival, and therefore take priority over other needs like, safety or belonging (Pichere and Cadiat, 2015). Similarly, Dukes and Smith (2009 p. 21) acknowledge the importance of meeting a young child's basic needs first and suggests that it is a crucial step needed before they are able to progress to stages of learning, discovery, building empathy and creating positive relationships.

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3. The Concept of Holistic Child Development

The aim of this essay is to explore the concept of holistic child development and how this approach aligns with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, whilst also highlighting the connection between achieving basic needs and nurturing self-actualisation in children. Holistic child development involves acknowledging, understanding and supporting all areas of a child's growth and learning, to help them thrive in every area of their life. This consists of their "physical, personal, social, emotional, spiritual and cognitive" development, and supporting the needs that come with it (Birth To 5 Matters, no date). Johnston *et al.* (2018) discusses Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which is a five-tier pyramid, where individuals start at the bottom and strive to reach the top. Those needs are physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and finally self-actualisation. Self-actualisation is at the peak of the hierarchy, which can only be reached once all other needs below have been met. This links holistic development with Maslow's hierarchy of needs as both look at the child as a whole and not just at one aspect of their development.

In Wales, holistic development is a core part of their framework for 'Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care (ECPLC)'. It focuses on supporting all aspects of a child's development, such as, their emotional, cognitive, physical and social development. This can be done through the child's play, through their relationships with others and through their environments. Having adults who can enable children's learning is a key to successful child development, as well as having "effective environments" which are safe and stimulating and "engaging experiences" which inspire curiosity and problem solving. Having a holistic development approach is key as it highlights that nurturing the "whole child" can hugely benefit their well-being, learning, resilience and their development (Welsh Government, 2023). The ECPLC aligns with Friedrich Froebel who also looked at the holistic development of children and their health, emotions, environment and social relationships. Froebel created open-ended toys which children could play with independently, which would then benefit in their development (Early Education, 2021). Both the ECPLC and Froebel can be linked to Maslow's Hierarchy of needs. According to Kline (no date), the hierarchy has a

holistic approach too. Which focuses on physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualisation needs, that align with looking at the child as a whole.

The Montessori Method is a very similar approach to holistic development. Dr. Maria Montessori was an Italian physician who developed a philosophy with the child at its centre. The Montessori Method is a child-centred approach that focuses on student-led learning with supportive and knowledgeable teachers encouraging children to explore, be independent, be curious and think critically in nurturing environments. It encourages children to use their natural curiosity and motivation to help support their growth in all areas of their development. This approach aligns with Maslow's hierarchy as it addresses children's needs for safety, esteem and self-actualisation. This is because of the nurturing environments and giving children the space to be independent and confident learners (American Montessori Society, no date).

Lev Vygotsky is another theorist who shares similar philosophies to a holistic approach. According to Bodrova and Leong (2007), Vygotsky believed that mental tools or "tools of the mind" are just as important as the physical tools that help with tasks. An example of this would be using memory strategies to help an individual remember lots of information. As children learn these tools from adults, it is the practitioner's responsibility to support and encourage them to use these tools creatively and independently. The goal being that, after a while, those children will be able to create and be confident using new mental tools and therefore becoming independent and skilled thinkers. Vygotsky's theory aligns with Maslow's hierarchy as highlights the social needs that are necessary for a child's development and how practitioners can support them towards self-actualisation.

Although there are many positive attributes to using a holistic development approach, it is not always possible for every child due to some potential factors which may get in the way of enabling a child's holistic development. According to NSPCC Learning (no date), a child's upbringing, their relationships and their life experiences all impact their development and mental health. Factors, for example, trauma and abuse, will have an effect on a child's cognitive, behavioural and social wellbeing. This can lead to a child being fearful the majority of the time or certain situations, also the child may struggle with self-regulation and can dissociate, and they are more likely to experience depression as they get older (The National Child

Traumatic Stress Network, no date). This makes climbing Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs potentially difficult as the child's basic needs like safety and security are not being met. Without these needs being fulfilled, it will be difficult for them to reach self-actualisation which is the hope from a holistic development approach.

Whilst there are plenty of individuals who agree with and support Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, there are some who disagree with its premise. Stoyanov (2017) argues that individuals physiological and safety needs are usually met by governments through healthcare, welfare, benefit and safety services. As their fundamental needs are met it then allows them to focus on their love, esteem, and self-actualisation needs. However, this is not the same for individuals living in poor or high crime rate areas. These individuals will focus on their survival and safety needs first. If their physiological and safety needs are constantly at risk, it makes it extremely hard to achieve any of the higher needs. Hofstede (1984, cited in King-Hill, 2015, p. 55) argues that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs reflects a Western and culturally biased view, and that it doesn't consider cultural differences in society or individual's needs. Hofstede also highlighted the contrast between "collectivist and individualistic society". Meaning a community-oriented society will prioritise the needs of the group, for example, belonging and community. Whereas an "individualistic society" will focus on their own individual needs, such as, self-actualisation and esteem.

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5. Maslow's significance in understanding child development

According to Mukherji and Dryden (2014) child development is often grouped into various domains. These include physical, cognitive, socio-emotional and language development. In the past, practitioners typically focused on one part of a child's development at a time. Whilst it may be helpful to look at these areas separately sometimes, they are all interconnected. Children's development is holistic and is influenced by key principles that guide a child's overall growth. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs helps explain how these principles work. Beloglovsky and Daly (2015, p. 21), notes that Maslow created the hierarchy to show the essential steps needed for a child to grow and thrive. Before this can happen, their basic needs must be met first. These needs begin with physiological, followed by safety, then love and belonging, next is esteem and finally self-actualisation. The hierarchy shows how the different parts of a child's development are connected, and how Maslow's theory acts as a guide to understanding this process.

This paper will discuss three case studies regarding children who have struggled to achieve self-actualisation due to certain needs not being met. It will also discuss what the role of the adult is in these situations and how it can benefit the child's development. Also, it will note how this relates back to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the key principles within it.

Supporting a child through transitioning to full time school

Max is 4 years old and is transitioning to full time school. Max is very distressed and does not want to leave his parents in the morning. Kaufman (2020) notes that we all have a need for safety and security, and love and belongingness and that sometimes we have struggles in life that can impact those needs, making us go two steps forward and one step back. Max's needs have been impacted due to being put in an unfamiliar environment with adults and children he does not know. According to NDNA (2020) the way a practitioner can support this transition is to establish daily routines in school and work on creating and maintaining strong relationships with the child. This should then help the child achieve their love and belonging need. Also, building good communication with parents is key so they are all able to share

important information about the child's holistic development. Communicating to parents about routines of their child's day and encouraging the parent to discuss this with the child can help make the transition in the morning from parent to school easier. As the link between what the parent has said, to what is happening at school, is the same. Therefore, building on the safety and security need of that child.

Supporting a child in poverty

Bianca is 5 years old and is in full time school. Bianca lives with her 3 siblings and her single income father who struggles with financial issues. This has an impact on Bianca and her basic needs not being met. Article 27 from The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child created in 1989 states that every child has the right to "food, clothing and a clean safe home" (Children in Wales, 2024). Children's Commissioner for Wales (2024) contradicts this article, as they write that among all the children living in Wales, at least 30% of them live in poverty. This means that 30% of children are not having their basic needs met in Wales. Maslow's theory highlights that if the physiological needs are not met, children cannot progress toward self-actualisation (Simons, Irwin and Drinnien, 1987). To support Bianca and her family, local authorities in Wales have implemented a "free school meal" scheme, which allows all children eligible to receive a free lunch every day. School's also offer breakfast club for free to all children, providing them with a healthy breakfast. Therefore supporting in meeting the basic needs of the child (Welsh Government Initiative, no date). Practitioners can support Bianca by building relationships with her, creating a nurturing and safe environment at school and having good communication with her father. Schools can also start a 'pre-loved' clothing to support families of poverty, which can help achieve the child's basic needs.

Supporting a child with avoidant attachment

Ana is 6 years old and in full time education. Ana lives with her mother, father and her younger brother and sister. At school, Ana does not ask for help or support from adults, will not join in with group activities and will copy adult behaviour, instead of playing with the other children. According to Shalamar Children (2015) based on Bowlby's attachment theory, Ana is showing signs of avoidant attachment. When a parent/caregiver neglects a child's needs, does not connect emotionally or dismisses them when they are upset, the child learns not to rely on them for support. This

makes the child appear overly independent, they will avoid seeking comfort when hurt and will treat caregivers and strangers the same. Hopper (2020) discusses Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and states that" children require a safe and predictable home or environment." If these needs are not met, children can often respond with fear or anxiety. Practitioners working with Ana can support her by and providing comfort and care which encourages Ana to express any feelings or needs she may have. Create a safe, secure and supportive environment to meet Ana's safety need, and build trust and a relationship to support the love and belonging need.

Conclusion

Montessori (1965, quoted in Weinberg, 2012, pp. 16-21) states that education should not be seen as just teaching, but as supporting the whole psychological development of the child. Unlike traditional methods that focus on one area at a time, a holistic approach supports all parts of a child's growth and encourages their overall well-being. It sees the whole child and understands that each part of their development affects the others, and that they all connect. This is incredibly important for children as "it provides a strong foundation for a child's lifelong learning and wellbeing." Supporting children in these areas means that they can achieve their full potential (Queen Margaret University, 2023). This all relates back to Maslow and his hierarchy of needs, and shows why Maslow is so significant to Early Years practice. Kairen (2011, p. 133) notes that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs shows that everyone has basic needs that must be met before they can reach their full potential. In early years, Maslow's theory is important because it helps practitioners understand children's needs and support them to becoming self-actualised individuals.

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