

Human Development

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Unit 1:

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

1. Physical needs.

These are the most basic of needs for survival; food, water, warmth, and rest.

These needs are important because according to the Hierarchy of needs, without these basics a child would be unable to progress onto the other levels in the pyramid to achieve self-actualisation. UNCRC, Article 24 (2024) (Health and Health Services) explains that every child has the right to the highest standard of health. Governments are required to ensure access to quality healthcare, clean water, nutritious food, and a safe environment. Wealthier nations are also obligated to support poorer countries in achieving these goals. In terms of holistic child development, a child wouldn't be able to function in an educational setting without these needs being met, a child needs nutritious food to concentrate, water to avoid dehydration and therefore illness, and warm, appropriate clothing and shelter to be comfortable enough to concentrate and thrive. A multi-agency support system (including teachers, health visitors, GP, and any other relevant professionals) in place for children helps support this need, as this will help ensure a child has all their basic needs met, and parents/ guardians have the support needed to put this in place.

2.Safety and security

The need for a safe environment, boundaries, and security.

These needs are essential for healthy child development, as they create the stable and nurturing environment necessary for children to grow and thrive in all aspects—physically, emotionally, and cognitively. Stoyanov (2017) states that Maslow believes safety is key to helping children grow up healthy and well-adjusted. He says children need a stable and predictable environment, free from unexpected dangers. If something bad does happen, they should have parents or guardians who can protect them and keep them safe. Children rely on their parents/guardians to put in place boundaries for their safety. Children will often test these boundaries and that's where they will learn right from wrong. During toddlerhood, it's important to let children explore and take part in risky play and from this they will gain their own sense of safety and understand their own capabilities and form their own boundaries. For example; Brody, (2018) states that if babies aren't given the chance to practice physical skills, they may become less confident when learning to walk. Trying to keep toddlers 'safe' by limiting their movement can increase the risk of accidents, as they haven't developed the physical skills needed, which can, in turn, impact their self-confidence and self-esteem.

3.Love and acceptance

The need for love, socialisation, and the feeling of belonging.

These needs are important for a child's development, as they allow a child to feel loved and cared for. This creates a foundation for the child that helps them feel safe to explore their surroundings, build relationships, and handle their emotions more effectively. When children feel accepted, they gain the confidence to express themselves freely without worrying about being rejected. Attachment is very important to children in the early years, Nspcc (2021), state that children can form attachments to multiple caregivers, but the bond with those who have provided consistent, close care from early infancy tends to be the strongest and longest lasting. There are different forms of attachment, a child that has had a healthy attachment with a caregiver is more likely to be able to recognise unstable and unhealthy relationships in the future.

4. Self Esteem

The need for self-confidence, a positive self-image, These needs are important as a child with good self-esteem will be more capable of dealing with challenges in life. When children have confidence in themselves, they are able to recover more quickly from disappointment, which helps lower feelings of anxiety, shame and frustration. Along with this, children with good self-esteem are more likely to keep trying after they fail, because they believe they can improve. This helps them stay calm and focused when things don't go as planned, and teaches them that mistakes are part of learning, not something to feel embarrassed about. Parents and teachers need to recognize how important self-esteem, self-respect, and the respect of others are for a child's holistic development. Without these, children can end up feeling inferior or worthless, which can stop them from reaching their full potential or becoming the best version of themselves, achieving self-actualisation. (Weinberg, 2011)

5. Self actualisation

The need for interests, hobbies, personal growth.

Self-actualization, when it comes to holistic child development, is about a child reaching their full potential in all areas; emotionally, intellectually, socially, and physically. It's the process of personal growth, where a child becomes the best version of themselves by developing their own unique talents, abilities, and values in a balanced and healthy way.

In an educational setting, self actualisation may be achieved giving children chances to explore art, music, and imaginative play, encouraging their interests.

A child that has all their needs met is more confident to be able to learn, ask questions and form healthy relationships with peers. Maslow's theory states that once the primary and secondary needs are met the opportunities for self actualisation are much greater as children can focus on these more without the burden of worrying about safety/hunger/ warmth.

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Unit 2

The concept of holistic child development

This essay aims to explore the concept of holistic child development. This essay will explore three of the main categories of holistic child development; Play, Relationships and wellbeing.

A concept is an idea or abstract thought that represents something in our mind. It is a mental structure that helps us understand and categorise the world. Concepts are essential for thinking because they enable us to organise information, make sense of our experiences, and share ideas.

The concept of holistic child development means understanding that a child's physical, cognitive, emotional, and social growth are interconnected and depend on one another. All areas of a child's development happen at the same time, and each part influences the others. Children grow and develop through the combined influence of all these areas. It is a way of understanding the real-life experiences of young children as they learn and develop. (Neaum, 2010)

Play

To understand the concept of holistic child development, it is important to consider the impact of play. Article 31 of the UNCRC states that 'Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.' This means that play is a right of any child and children should be supported to have time to play, explore and learn.

Play is very important for children's development because it helps them grow in many ways. It supports physical development by encouraging movement, which helps children get stronger and improve their coordination. Play also helps their brains develop, as activities like problem-solving and building things boost their thinking skills. Emotionally, play allows kids to express and understand their feelings, while learning how to deal with challenges. Socially, play teaches children how to interact with others, share, take turns, and solve problems together. (Raising Children, 2022)

Vygotsky's concept of the "more knowledgeable other" (MKO) refers to someone who has more experience or knowledge and helps guide a child's learning. In play, the MKO can be a teacher, parent, or peer who supports and challenges the child's thinking. Through guided play, the MKO helps the child move beyond their current abilities, providing the right level of support to encourage new skills and understanding. Vygotsky also discusses the 'ZPD,' zone of proximal development, which is the difference of what a child can complete alone, or with support. Caregivers, or peers playing alongside the child, provide the 'scaffolding,' support the child needs, within the 'ZPD'. This interaction during play is key to a child's development, as it helps them learn in a social, engaging, and supportive environment. (Conkabyir, Pascal 2014)

Relationships

Positive relationships are a key part to holistic child development, as they offer the emotional support, trust, and safety children need to grow in every aspect. When children have strong bonds with caregivers, teachers, and friends, they feel secure and appreciated, which enhances their emotional health and helps build their self-confidence. Maslow's hierarchy of needs demonstrates the importance of relationships in the pyramid, as without these positive relationships a child will struggle to reach self-actualisation due to feelings of loneliness, lack of trust and confidence.

Bowlby's attachment theory explores the importance of children having a secure attachment to a caregiver. Lindon, 2015, discusses Bowlby's attachment theory, and how attachment is an internal set of feelings, which can't be seen, but the effects of secure attachment can be observed through a child's behaviours. For example, a child with an insecure attachment to their caregiver may be more 'clingy,' and less confident to leave their caregivers side.

Lindon, 2015 also discusses the hormonal impact, stating that children that have had difficult childhoods without secure attachments, will have a higher level of the stress hormone, cortisol. Too much of this hormone will inhibit a child's ability to learn in positive ways. In terms of holistic development, this demonstrates the importance of positive relationships as a child without the security of a consistent caregiver could be dysregulated and unable to develop emotionally as they should.

Wellbeing

Wellbeing is very important to consider when discussing holistic child development as it encompasses many different elements. Bronfenbrenner's theory of the ecological system model demonstrates how the many different layers of a child's environment can positively or negatively affect a child's wellbeing.

The closest layer to the child is called the microsystem, which includes family, friends, teachers and caregivers. The third layer, the exosystem, the child is not directly involved, but the family can be; for example, events from the exosystem can have a knock-on effect on the child. A parent who is carrying stress from work may then be less patient, or angry at home, and this will affect the child's wellbeing. (Gray. Mcblain, 2012)

Mental health is essential to a child's overall wellbeing and can be influenced by various factors, including abuse, neglect, family circumstances, environment, stress, and feelings of loneliness or social isolation. Negative experiences, such as trauma or neglect, can have a harmful impact on a child's mental health, while positive experiences, such as supportive relationships and a nurturing environment, can help improve it. (NSPCC Learning, 2021)

Wellbeing also includes the very basic needs from Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, such as nutrition, warmth and safety, and wellbeing is needed to achieve self-actualization.

Multi-agency support is needed for this, for example support from the GP for medical needs, Health visitor to ensure that the child is developing as they should be and meeting milestones, and then Teachers/ support staff in school to ensure children are having the educational support they need to thrive.

Conclusion

In conclusion, holistic child development shows how a child's physical, cognitive, emotional, and social growth are all connected. Play, relationships, and wellbeing are all important factors that support this development. Play helps children learn new skills, express themselves, and interact with others. Positive relationships with caregivers and peers provide the emotional support children need to feel safe and confident. Wellbeing, which includes things like nutrition and safety, ensures that children's basic needs are met, allowing them to grow and develop properly. By focusing on these areas, we can help children reach their full potential and thrive in all aspects of life.

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Unit 3

Maslow's significance in understanding child development

This essay will explore how Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory is significant in understanding holistic child development. This essay covers three main parts of early years practice; Transitions, providing opportunity to play and the importance of inclusive practice.

1. Transitions

Transitions happen very frequently in children's lives, and it's the job of an early years practitioner to support and guide the child through these big changes.

A key factor in ensuring a positive experience during transitions for young children is maintaining consistency between their home, caregivers, and all the environments that shape their individual learning journeys. Many children engage in various activities outside of the home setting, like childcare, toddler groups, or preschools, and may appear to adapt to change easily. However, some children can struggle with transitions, and it is the role of the early years practitioner to support them through this, (Birth to 5 Matters, 2021).

Children that have SEN, mental health struggles, behavioural issues, anxiety or an unstable home environment may struggle with transitions more than others. (Mentally healthy schools, 2020)

Transitions in childhood are closely linked to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, as these changes can impact a child's sense of security and stability, which are necessary for healthy development. According to Maslow, children must have their basic needs for safety, warmth, and food met before they can focus on higher levels of growth, such as self-esteem and self-actualization.

Frequent transitions, such as moving between caregivers or settings, can challenge a child's sense of security, potentially hindering their ability to develop trust and confidence. Ensuring smooth transitions helps children feel safe and supported, allowing them to thrive and progress through Maslow's hierarchy. (Weinberg, 2011)

2. Providing opportunities to play

Play is crucial for children and young people as it is the primary way they experience enjoyment, form friendships, and explore the world. Through play, children develop social, physical, and cognitive skills, as well as creativity, cultural awareness, and resilience. They learn to take risks, make decisions, and build their sense of identity. Children engage in play whenever they have the opportunity, and it differs from adult-directed or sports activities. In play, children follow their own instincts, ideas, and interests, expressing themselves in their own unique way. Play is fundamental for the development of happy, healthy, capable, and resilient children. (Play England, 2024)

In a professional setting, the early years practitioner has a responsibility to ensure every child has the opportunity to play. Play is a right of the child, and this is outlined in Article 31 of the UNCRC (Unicef, 2024)

Play provides children with the chance to develop essential social skills, including cooperation, sharing, and taking turns. (Mukherji, Dryden, 2014) These are necessary skills for the developing child, to build positive relationships and to develop their communication and understanding.

The role of the Early Years Practitioner with play is very diverse, sometimes it is necessary to step in and support a child, or to show them how something works, for example using Vygotsky's theory, a child will need assistance from the 'More Knowledgeable Other.' (Johnston, Jane *et al* 2018)

Johnston, Jane *et al* (2018) go on to discuss the importance of risky play, and state that children need opportunities to encounter risk in their play so they can learn and become confident in assessing risks. The more children have the opportunity to do this, the more confident they will be in making decisions, and their play will become more fulfilling and meaningful.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs shows the importance of self-esteem and having confidence to make decisions is a key part of this. Children who have their esteem needs met feel respected, strong and capable and are able to progress onto self-actualisation.

3. Inclusive practice in early years settings

Inclusive practice in early years ensures that all children, regardless of their background or abilities, are supported and included in learning. It involves adapting teaching methods and resources to meet individual needs, including those of children with disabilities or different cultural backgrounds. By fostering an inclusive environment, early years settings promote a sense of belonging, respect for diversity, and support children's social, emotional, and cognitive development, helping them reach their full potential.

The role of the early years practitioner is to ensure that they have an awareness of inclusivity and strive to ensure every child feels included and supported. Every child has the right to a quality education that upholds high standards, meets their individual needs, and supports them in achieving the best possible outcomes and reaching their full potential (Department of Education, 2021)

Multi agency working is key for ensuring inclusive practice, ensuring that the child is getting the support they need through seeking expertise from health care professionals, such as occupational therapy, speech and language team, and health visitors. (Department of Education, 2021)

Maria Montessori's theory is interesting to consider when discussing inclusivity in the early years, as it involves areas specifically being set up for a child, for example children are able to attend to their own needs for food/drink as they will be stored in an area specifically made accessible for young children. In Montessori settings all materials are accessible to a child's height, and children are encouraged to join in with jobs that are usually left to the adults, for example washing dishes, watering plants and preparing food. (Aubrey, Riley 2022)

Maslow's hierarchy of needs emphasizes the importance of fulfilling children's basic needs, such as safety, belonging, and self-esteem, before they can reach their full potential. In early years settings, inclusivity plays a key role in meeting these needs by ensuring all children feel safe, valued, and accepted. When children feel they belong and have equal opportunities to take part, they are more likely to develop confidence and security, which helps them move through Maslow's hierarchy and progress in their social, emotional, and cognitive growth. (Weinberg, 2011).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Maslow's hierarchy of needs can be linked to every part of holistic child development. This essay has explored the importance of supporting a child through transitions, and how transitions can affect a child's feeling of security. Alongside this, the importance of play has been discussed and how risky play can help develop a child's self esteem and the role of the early years practitioner is to provide opportunities to play. Finally, Inclusive practice is explored, discussing how Montessori theory encourages inclusivity and how inclusive practice ensures children feel a sense of belonging.

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Appendix

I confirm that AI has not been used in this assignment