

Student number: 2518138
Word count – 3,185
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The Human Development Portfolio

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 my drafts, notes, and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

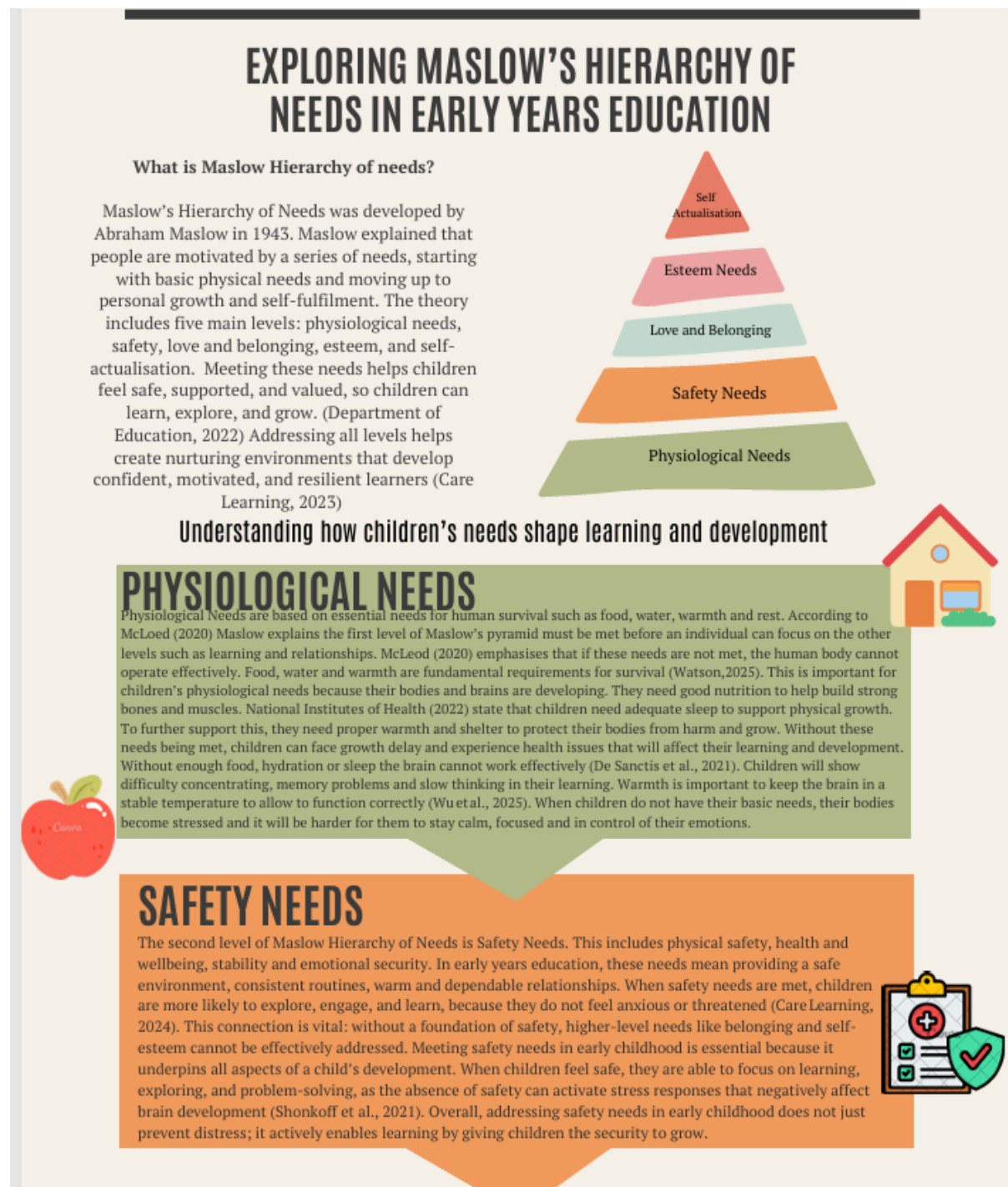
Component 1 – Infographic (1,057 words)
Component 2 – Written Essay (1,028 words)
Component 3 – Reflection (1,100 words)

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Part 1 - Develop an infographic to explore Maslow's model in depth (1000 words)



LOVE AND BELONGING

Maslow's third level of motivation includes the human need for affection, friendship, intimacy and a sense of belonging. The feeling of being accepted by others such as a school and being part of a community. Ye (2024) argues that supporting children's love and belonging needs is essential for healthy development because strong, positive relationships provide the emotional safety required for learning, exploration, and social growth. Allen et al.,(2021) research shows that children sense of belonging at home, with peers and at school display higher emotional wellbeing, greater confidence, and stronger motivation to participate and persevere in learning tasks. When belonging needs are unmet, children are more likely to experience loneliness, anxiety, and behavioural difficulties, which can negatively impact cognitive development and academic engagement (Korpershoek et al., 2020).



ESTEEM NEEDS

Maslow's esteem needs, the fourth level in his hierarchy, involve the human desire for self-respect, competence, achievement, and recognition from others. In early childhood, these needs are critical because young children are developing a sense of self-worth, confidence, and agency. When children receive positive feedback, encouragement, and recognition for their effort this may be at home and in early learning settings, they develop emotional security, motivation to explore, and persistence in learning task. (Bennett-Pierre, et al. 2024) Equally, when esteem needs are unmet, children may experience low self-confidence, feelings of weakness, and reluctance to participate, which can impede social, emotional, and cognitive development (Rubin, 2023). Educators and caregivers are crucial in supporting children's esteem needs by offering opportunities to develop skills, acknowledging accomplishments, and nurturing a sense of capability. This not only enhances academic engagement but also strengthens resilience, promotes independence, and encourages positive social relationships. Fulfilling esteem needs in the early years is therefore vital for helping children build the confidence and motivation they need to succeed both in school and later in life.



SELF ACTUALISATION

Self-actualisation is the highest level in Maslow's hierarchy of needs and refers to a person's drive to achieve their full potential. Supported by United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child article 29, education should develop a child's personality, talents, and abilities to their fullest. Maslow argued that once lower-level needs largely satisfied, self-actualisation becomes a dominant motivator in early childhood. Children are motivated to explore, be creative and grow to develop motivation independent of external rewards. Brooks & Kirk (2024) say that early years settings support self – actualisation by giving children agency, choice and independence, helping them to pursue their interests and reaching their goal. This means children are active participants in their learning. This will boost motivation, creativity, and problem-solving skills. For a child who loves building with blocks, curiosity and the desire to create may be their dominant motivator. Children aren't learning just to get praise or a reward but are driven by intrinsic interest. So, supporting self-actualisation in early childhood helps children stay motivated, be creative, and solve problems, giving them the confidence and independence they need to enjoy learning now and succeed in the future.



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs shows that children's learning and development depend on meeting a sequence of essential needs. From physiological needs like food and sleep, to safety, belonging, esteem, and finally self-actualisation, each level builds the foundation for the next. By addressing these needs, educators and caregivers create nurturing environments where children feel safe, supported, and valued. This enables them to focus, explore, be creative, and develop confidence and resilience, laying the groundwork for lifelong learning and personal growth.



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Part 2 – Explore in depth the concept of holistic child development with links to
Maslow's model.

This essay examines how Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs supports holistic child development and how children's transitions influence their growth. It connects Maslow's concepts such as safety, love, belonging, and esteem to key developmental areas. The discussion also considers how limited warmth or emotional support at home can make transitions more challenging. Drawing on attachment theory, the essay explores how early relationships shape emotional security, resilience, and the capacity to build new connections. Overall, it highlights the importance of secure, nurturing care in helping children navigate change with confidence and wellbeing.

Holistic development covers every aspect of a young child's growth, including moral, emotional, physical, cognitive, social, and language development. Lombard et al (2021) explain that children develop in a "bottom-up" way, meaning that early sensory abilities such as sight, hearing, and touch need to be established first because they provide the groundwork for more advanced skills. Children also emphasise that play-based learning is vital in early childhood because play promotes sensory exploration and helps build the neural connections children need to make sense of and engage with their surroundings. O'Keeffe et al (2022) explain that holistic development is important because children's skills do not grow in isolation and each area of development supports and strengthens the others. Eğrikılınç et al (2024) state that early sensory foundations are secure, children are better able to develop higher-level abilities such as problem-solving, communication, and emotional regulation. Play-based learning further supports this by giving children opportunities to explore, experiment, and make sense of the world, which directly contributes to healthy brain development. By nurturing all areas of development together, practitioners can help children become confident, resilient, and well-rounded learners who are better equipped to cope with challenges and transitions in later life.

Holistic development recognises that children grow across interconnected physical, cognitive, social and emotional domains, and Maslow's theory helps explain how these areas rely on the fulfilment of fundamental needs. Perry (2021) supports the idea that safety and security are essential foundations for healthy development, as children who experience stability and protection show stronger attention, exploration, and early learning behaviours. Perry's idea reflects Maslow's view that basic safety underpins higher-level growth. The need for love and belonging relates closely to social and emotional development by showing that warm, responsive relationships promote secure attachment, emotional regulation and prosocial behaviour (Smith et al., 2020). These findings align with Maslow's claim that belongingness supports emotional wellbeing and social competence. Similarly, esteem needs including praise, encouragement and opportunities to achieve are linked to confidence, resilience and motivation, all of which contribute to children's cognitive and emotional development (O'Connor & McCartney, 2017). When children's needs for security, connection and esteem are met, they can engage in creative thinking, problem-solving and independent learning, reflecting progress towards the higher-level development that Maslow describes. Therefore, even in modern research, Maslow's framework helps explain how different areas of holistic development depend on the fulfilment of interconnected needs.

Early childhood transitions are changes children experience when moving between environments, routines, or developmental stages such as home to preschool. Children's transitional experiences often depend on the level of emotional support and stability they receive. Agami-Turjeman et al. (2025) shows that children who have secure, supportive relationships with parents and caregivers are better able to manage the social and emotional challenges that come with moving into new settings. Morawska et al. (2024) found that parents commonly worry about children's emotional readiness, behaviour and social skills during major transitions. The study highlights that strong home-school partnerships, consistent support, and open communication help children adapt, while limited warmth, reassurance, or stability can make these transitions more challenging. Without nurturing relationships, children may struggle to develop a secure emotional base, leading to difficulties with confidence, emotional regulation, and forming trusting relationships with others. Wan

& Huang (2025) found that low parental warmth can impair children's emotional regulation and social skills. Soffers et al., (2023) found increasing anxiety and behavioural issues during transitions to new settings which directly reflects Maslow's principle that unmet social and emotional needs hinder development. This demonstrates that emotional support plays a central role in shaping children's transition experiences and their ability to cope with change.

Bowlby's Attachment Theory emphasises that early relationships form the foundation for a child's emotional security, resilience, and future capacity to build positive connections. Bowlby proposed that children need a consistent, sensitive caregiver who provides a "secure base" from which they can explore and regulate their emotions. Shonkoff (2020) suggests secure attachment contributes to stronger emotional regulation, social competence, and resilience in early childhood. Similarly to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, particularly the lower-level needs of safety, love, and belonging, which must be met before higher-level growth. When children experience warmth, predictability, and emotional responsiveness, these needs are fulfilled, allowing them to thrive holistically emotionally, socially, cognitively, and physically.

Practitioners foster secure attachment by offering consistent routines, nurturing interactions, and attuned communication, creating environments that build children's confidence and wellbeing (Geddes and Kelly, 2019). These secure early relationships also support smooth transitions, whether starting nursery or moving between routines, as securely attached children show greater adaptability and reduced anxiety in unfamiliar contexts (Dalli et al., 2021). In contrast, when early attachment needs and Maslow's belonging needs are unmet, children may experience heightened anxiety, difficulties forming relationships, behavioural challenges, and barriers to cognitive development (Fearon & Belsky, 2016). This can restrict their ability to progress to higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy and negatively affect holistic development.

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Overall, integrating Bowlby's attachment principles with Maslow's framework highlights that nurturing, responsive relationships are central to children's wellbeing, learning, and long-term development.

In conclusion, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provides a practical framework for supporting holistic child development by emphasising the importance of meeting fundamental needs for safety, love, belonging, and esteem. Integrating Bowlby's Attachment Theory highlights how secure, nurturing early relationships foster emotional security, resilience, and enabling children to manage transitions confidently. Holistic development is interconnected, and unmet needs whether emotional, social, or safety-related can hinder growth across cognitive, social, emotional, and physical domains. By recognising and addressing these foundational needs, practitioners can create environments that promote well-rounded, confident, and resilient learners, demonstrating the enduring relevance of Maslow's model in early childhood practice.

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Part 3 - Offer three examples from Early Years practice to highlight Maslow's significance in understanding child development.

Reflecting on Maslow's Significance in Early Years Practice Using Gibbs' Model

During my time in the early years setting, I observed and interacted with children aged 2–5 years. Three experiences demonstrated the relevance of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in understanding child development and guiding early years practice.

Description – Example 1

The first situation involved Child J, who had recently joined the early years setting and appeared very hesitant to take part in group activities. On his first day, he stood near the door and avoided interacting with others. When invited to take part in a simple group game, he withdrew, crossed his arms, and avoided eye contact. His behaviour suggested anxiety rather than lack of ability, the unfamiliar environment, adults, and routines were overwhelming for him. Observing this made me realise that, before expecting participation, he needed reassurance, emotional safety, and time to explore the setting at his own pace.

Feelings

Initially, I felt challenged and even a little anxious myself when Child J avoided group activities. I wanted him to feel included but did not want to pressure him, and this left me uncertain about how best to support him. I felt empathy for his fear and vulnerability, but also a sense of frustration as I wanted him to feel confident more quickly. This situation made me think how best to support Child J's emotional well-being.

Evaluation

There were both positive and challenging aspects to this experience. On the positive side, Child J's behaviour highlighted the importance of establishing a sense of safety before expecting engagement. By offering gentle encouragement and allowing him space to become familiar with the environment, he began to show small signs of confidence. However, it was challenging to balance supporting him while still engaging with the rest of the group. His reluctance emphasised how essential it is to meet children's basic emotional needs before expecting participation in learning tasks.

Analysis

Maslow's hierarchy helps explain Child J's behaviour. His physiological and safety needs were not yet met, which made it difficult for him to explore or interact. Huang, W (2024) suggests that children who feel unsafe or uncertain struggle with learning, play, and social interaction Child J's behaviour demonstrated this clearly. Without emotional safety, expecting him to join in group activities would have been unrealistic.

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Description – Example 2

The second situation involved Child A, who showed intense distress during morning separation. As her parent left, she cried loudly, clung to them, and refused to engage with peers or activities. She spent several minutes looking around for familiar faces and repeatedly reached for the staff for comfort. Even after her parent had left, she stayed close to a familiar adult and held tightly to her comfort toy. Her behaviour suggested her need for belonging and emotional security in Maslow's hierarchy was not yet met. Without this, she could not settle or participate confidently. This highlighted the importance of sensitive responses to separation anxiety and the need to build trust over time.

Feelings

Watching Child A struggle with separation caused a strong sense of empathy. I could see how frightened she felt, which made me want to comfort her. At the same time, I felt uncertain about how to support her without increasing her anxiety. I worried that the wrong approach could make her feel more insecure. I also felt torn between wanting to give her full attention and needing to support the other children in the room.

Evaluation

Child A's distress strongly demonstrated the importance of belonging and emotional connection in early childhood. By offering consistent reassurance, using a gentle tone, and allowing her comfort toy, we gradually helped her settle. These strategies reduced her crying and encouraged her to explore the environment at her own pace. Although supporting her required time, patience, and emotional awareness, the outcome was positive. The experience reinforced that meeting emotional needs is not optional, it is essential for healthy development and engagement.

Analysis

Child A's behaviour aligns with Maslow's belonging and love needs. Without strong attachments, children struggle to regulate their emotions or explore independently. Her distress also connects with Bowlby's attachment theory, which states that children rely on secure attachments to feel safe enough to learn and take risks. Tang (2024) demonstrates that secure attachments promote resilience, emotional regulation, and social skill.

Description – Example 3

The third situation involved Child L, who initially appeared insecure when faced with an art activity. He stated that he "wasn't good at drawing" and seemed reluctant to begin. I offered encouragement and broke the task into small steps. As Child L worked, he became more engaged and visibly more confident. By the end, he proudly showed his artwork to staff and peers. His sense of achievement reflected the fulfilment of Maslow's self-esteem needs, including competence, recognition, and pride in achievement.

Feelings – Example 3

Supporting Child L made me feel proud and satisfied. Seeing his confidence grow reinforced my belief in the importance of sensitive precise support. It reminded me

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how children's self-belief can shift when they experience success and encouragement.

Evaluation – Example 3

In Child L's case, offering opportunities for decision-making, independence, and manageable challenges helped to boost his self-esteem. This positively influenced his motivation and willingness to participate socially.

Analysis – Example 3

Child L's experience reflects Maslow's higher-level esteem needs. Achievement and recognition motivated him and strengthened his confidence. Mak and Fancourt (2019) found that children who take part in arts activities, like drawing, painting, music, have higher self-esteem, especially when supported by adults. This shows that early year's practitioners can use creative activities to help children build confidence and meet their esteem needs.

Conclusion

Across the three experiences, I realised that children's behaviours often emerge from unmet needs. Maslow's hierarchy is not just theoretical; it is a practical tool for understanding children's development. These reflections highlighted the central importance of emotional safety, belonging, and self-esteem for learning and engagement. They also emphasised the need for empathy, patience, and responsive strategies in supporting children's diverse needs.

Plan of Action

Moving forward, I will use Maslow's hierarchy to help assess and understand children's emotional and developmental needs, making sure that their basic needs for safety, belonging, and self-esteem are met before expecting them to take part in more complex learning. I will maintain a safe, welcoming environment so children feel secure and confident as they explore. Building strong, trusting relationships will be a key focus, and I will offer consistent reassurance to help children feel supported. I will also provide regular opportunities for success to boost their confidence and motivation. By following these steps, I can better support children's overall development and help them grow in resilience, confidence, and a sense of belonging.

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