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Assessing the Needs of the Learner through Maslow's Model of Self-Actualization

Dr. Anviti Rawat

Assistant Professor, Department of Education,
Maharaja Surajmal Institute (Affiliated to GGSIPU), Delhi, India

Abstract:

This conceptual paper reflects on the application of Maslow's theory of Hierarchy of needs in the area of education. The importance the self-actualizers in the field of education, let it be students or teachers are discussed. This paper will broaden the view of students, in-service teachers and pre-service teachers as well. The various ways the teacher can support the students to climb up the ladder of hierarchy of needs are given. Also the role of teacher as mentor in the classroom is focused by suggesting some attitudinal points through which the teachers can help every single student to become a "self-actualizer"

Keywords: Maslow, hierarchy of needs, self-actualization, students, teachers

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization when the philosophy of man is changing dynamically, then everything also changes at a faster pace. Not only the philosophy of politics, of economics, of ethics and values, of interpersonal relations and of history itself change, but also the philosophy of education, the theory of how to help men become what they can and deeply need to become gets changed. This means that the main philosophy which should guide any society to cope up the dynamic changes should focus on the ways for stimulating growth and development of individual, thus developing well-being in one's life. Humanistic psychology works on the same philosophy which defines itself as a "third force". The known proponent of third force who believed that the inner nature of an individual or the self need to be developed for the well being and quality of life of a person is Abraham Maslow. The important construct focused by him was "Self-Actualization". Abraham Maslow defined self-actualization as a "desire" to be "more and more of what one is", rather than a "driving force" to maximize all one is capable of. According to Abraham Maslow (1943) "Self-actualization is the desire in a human being to become actualized in what he is capable of becoming". Maslow felt that self-actualization gives an individual a desire to achieve their ambitions. According to Maslow's theory of Human Motivation human behavior is motivated by a set of needs. The five different levels of hierarchy of needs are displayed as under:

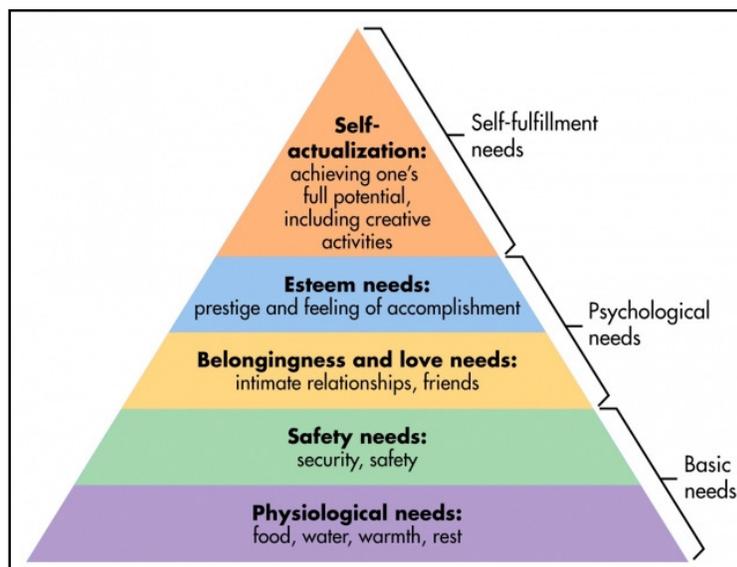


Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

This hierarchy suggests that a lower order need should be satisfied to proceed towards higher order need. The four lower needs are also called as deficiency needs as these needs arise due to deprivation. According to Maslow the self-actualization is a growth need as it emerges from a desire to develop as a person. According to Maslow Self-actualization cannot normally be reached until other lower order hierarchy of needs is not satisfied. He also stated that Self-Actualization involves the need for personal growth which is present throughout their lives. He stated that human motivation is based on people seeking accomplishment and change through personal growth. Self-Actualized people are those who were satisfied and doing all they are capable of. He also gave three pre-conditions to self-actualization which includes an absence of restraints, no or little distraction from deficiency needs and a good knowledge about self. Further Maslow divided people into two categories: self-actualizers and non-actualizers. Self-actualizers are those who desire to become of what they are capable of and non-actualizers who don't desire for personal growth. He said that one of the reasons of non-actualizers could be "Jonah Complex" (1962) which means when people are actually afraid of self-actualization as it will bring along the duties and responsibilities accompanied with it. On the other hand, Maslow also stated that the people who have reached self-actualization could be identified on the basis of the following fifteen characteristics:

- i. Efficient perception of reality
- ii. Acceptance of self, others and nature
- iii. Spontaneity, simplicity, naturalness
- iv. Problem centring
- v. Detachment: need for privacy
- vi. Autonomy: Independence of culture and environment
- vii. Continued freshness of appreciation
- viii. Peak of Mystic Experiences
- ix. Social interest
- x. Interpersonal relations
- xi. Democratic character structure
- xii. Discrimination between means and ends
- xiii. Sense of philosophical humour
- xiv. Creativeness
- xv. Resistance to enculturation

2. Self-actualization and Education

Maslow emphasized that the need for self-actualization is a healthy man's prime motivation. Self-actualization means actualizing one's potentials, becoming everything one is capable of becoming. He said, "What a man can be must be". It is person's desire for self improvement, or actual use of potentials, talents and capacities. To actualize is to become the total kind of person that one wants to become to reach the peak of his or her potential. He theorized that a persons' degree of need gratification is positively related with his degree of psychological health; and the psychologically healthiest persons are those who are motivated primarily by need of self-actualization. According to Maslow the healthiest people are able to take positive self actions and thus able to become better teachers, parents etc. A.W. Combs (1984)¹ stated the importance of self-actualization in education, by saying that: "The educational aim must be self-actualization, the development of the citizens who would be willing to serve humanity and nation." This focuses on the significance of self-actualizers not only for a strong educational system but also for a strong nation. As teachers are the most significant taskforce working directly for humanity and development of future citizens of a nation; if the level of self actualization among the prospective teachers is investigated, their psychological health status could be predicted and could act as boon in the area of teacher education and the society as a whole. Garland & Foster (1972) and Aspy's (1969)² recommended that, "Maslow's hierarchy should be part of the curriculum of teacher training programs and found accomplishment among their students as they proceeded toward course completion. They also found that if individuals have self-actualizing experiences during career preparation, they may be motivated to enter the same career". Research in education by Carver & Sergiovanni et al. (1971) have also found that, "The absence of three self-esteem, autonomy, and self-actualization needs leads to dissatisfaction among teachers. Hull, Jeanne Anne (1976) further recommended that the construct of self-actualization should be considered as an important criterion for future selection of prospective teachers. Emmanuel Ikenyiri and Richard Ihua-Maduenyi (2010) further found that self actualization needs are major predictors of the job performance. When teachers' needs are satisfied, it promotes their psychological well-being and promotes better performance. It was also found that teachers' places the self-actualization need as motivation for teachers' effectiveness. Self actualizing teachers have been described as individuals who are not saints and do have imperfections, but these are those who are freer to give of themselves to humanity more effectively than the average persons. So, it's just not the self-actualization of teachers which is important for their professional success but also a self-actualized teacher can provide a psychological healthy, open, caring and creative learning environment for the students and let them be what they want to be and could be. The self-actualized teacher would help the students to meet their deficiency needs and lead them to work for their growth needs to achieve the level of self-actualization.

¹ A. J Buchel (2009). The impact of HIV on the self-actualization of role players of the school management. Retrieved online through: uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/1956/04chapter4.pdf

² Tunks, Jeanne. (2008). Teacher Identity Formation: A Case Study of First Year Teachers' Development across Maslow's Hierarchy of Need. Retrieved from http://faculty.coe.unt.edu/sites/faculty/files/84/85/conf_pap_08.pdf

3. Ways to Address the Hierarchy of Needs of Learners

In a 21st century classroom a teacher plays multifaceted roles. One of the important roles which a teacher plays all the day is of a “Mentor”. In a classroom it is the duty of the teacher to address the various educational needs of the students. But focusing only on the needs given by Maslow which could help the students to self-actualize, the following ways could be implemented by the teacher in their classrooms to support the students to step up on each need of the ladder:

- Addressing Physiological Needs: The teacher should be aware of the student’s basic needs like, felling thirsty, free lunch, bathroom facilities etc.
- Addressing Security Needs: Teachers must maintain safe and organized classrooms. Rules of Discipline in school/colleges should be made clear to the students, emergency procedures must be designed in advance, attitude of teacher should be accepting and warm etc.
- Addressing Belongingness Needs: In order to address these needs the teacher should focus on group exercises, keep the environment of the class light hearted, be empathetic, patient, provide situations requiring mutual trust etc.
- Addressing Esteem Needs: The teachers must adopt the questioning technique as it would encourage participation of the students and give them timely reinforcement, should avoid embarrassing statements, congratulating students privately and publically when they perform well etc.
- Addressing Self Actualization needs: For addressing these needs it is a strong teacher-student relationship which is needed to be build up to help the students to self-actualize. The teacher must motivate the students to attain their highest potentials. The teacher should always expect students to do their best, should give students freedom to explore etc. The teacher should also let the students realize their personal targets and work towards them. Let the student’s express personal beliefs and priorities. Let them make their choices to control their own development in the direction of their own values and let the students express their values. This means that the teacher should use the assistive tools to foster sense of self among the students.

4. Ways the Teachers could Help the Students to Self-actualize

The need to self-actualize is the highest need in the Maslow’s hierarchy. Moreover, it is not wrong to say that it is also the highest need which could maximum the level of motivation in individual to achieve to the maximum. So it is the need of today’s globalized age that our education system develops the students who could grow up to the level of self-actualization. Thus the teacher as the prime source of development for the child in formal education system could help the students to self-actualize through following ways:

- 1) The teachers may use standardized psychological tests to identify the levels of self-actualization of the students during their course of study and accordingly guide them to the path of self-actualization. Students’ profile of strengths and weaknesses should be prepared to identify the needs they need to fulfill.
- 2) The schools and colleges should conduct meditative and yoga sessions for the students as they will help them to increase their concentration, patience, emotional control and lead them to psychological well being.
- 3) It is the responsibility of teachers to guide the students towards personal and psychological growth. It cannot be denied that majorly it is the attitude of the teacher educator which could contribute to the psychological well being and performance of their students. Thus, some of the attitudinal point’s teachers need to focus are that they:
 - a) Should respond to the potential an individual has for growing into a self-actualizing person of his/her own kind.
 - b) Should be aware about the level of need hierarchy where the student stands.
 - c) Should teach students to be true and aware about their inner self.
 - d) Must observe that the student’s basic needs are satisfied.
 - e) Should make the student to value beauty and nature.
 - f) Must teach students to be good choosers by making them to practice it in various educational settings.
 - g) Must enrich the students’ abilities through various activities that will highlight their talents.
 - h) Must assist the students to discover their potentials and guide them towards self-actualization.
 - i) Should be of the belief system that one can achieve anything with the hard work and should imbibe the same belief system in the students through mentoring and experiences.
 - j) Should believe that self-actualizers as inherently motivated and thrilled personalities are the people who want to become what they are capable of and should form the spine of a society because of their extraordinary qualities.
 - k) Must understand that their feedback on the students’ performance is considered important only when the feedback is constructive and accurate and is supported by specific steps which the trainee can undertake to improve him or herself.

5. Conclusion

In a nutshell it can be said that Maslow theory has great impact on educational structure and each level of the hierarchy of needs can be applied to the benefits of better education to the students. It is the responsibility of a teacher to guide the students towards personal growth using the principles of this theory in practice. It cannot be denied that majorly it is the attitude of the teacher which could contribute to the self-actualization of their students. Thus, if the education sector could have majority of the high self actualized pre-service and in-service teachers who can more easily and freely give of themselves to humanity more effectively than the average persons then this could generate effective human resources for any sector of country’s development.

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