


Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in an Inclusion Classroom- By Kaitlin Lutz

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All students have basic needs to be met for learning to occur. The more needs that are met, the more students will learn. Maslow's hierarchy, developed by Abraham Maslow in 1954, is a way of organizing the basic needs of students on different levels (McLeod, 2007). The more levels that are met, the more a student will learn. Maslow's hierarchy of needs applies especially to students with exceptionalities, because many times students' with exceptionalities needs are more difficult to meet.



What is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs?

According to Gorman in the Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal, there are six levels to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The first level is physiological needs. The first level must be met in order to move onto any other levels in the hierarchy. Physiological needs include the basic necessities of life (Gorman, 2010). These needs may include food, water, and shelter.

Once physiological needs are met, students will then need the second level of Maslow's hierarchy. The second level is safety needs. Students need to feel safe in the environment in which they are learning with no outside threats. If a student feels like they could potentially be harmed, this level of safety will not be met.

After physiological needs and safety needs are met, students will reach the third level of the hierarchy. In the third level of the hierarchy, students need to feel a feeling of belongingness and love. At this level, students will want to feel a sense of belonging with other people in their environment (Maslow, 1943). In this level, students need to identify with a group or groups of other students and need to feel that they do fit in.

In the fourth level of the hierarchy, which can only be reached after levels one, two, and three are met, students now have to face esteem needs. In the fourth level, students want to have good esteem through recognition and achievement (Maslow, 1943). By getting recognition from others, students feel confident in their ability to learn.

At the fifth level, self-actualization becomes important. At the fifth level, the student looks for ways to fulfill their personal potential for learning, and seek fulfillment in their learning. At this level students will strive for certain learning goals and seek to achieve them (Gorman, 2010). For example, at this level, students may want to receive an "A" on their test or may seek to read a certain number of books.

In the final and sixth level of the hierarchy, which can only be reached if all levels are previously met, students now are motivated through self-transcendence. At this level, students have already met many of their personal goals and are now motivated to improve the people around them (Gorman, 2010). By motivating and helping those around them, they in turn can have a better sense of understanding and can improve their personal experience. At this level students are concerned about the learning of other students. For example, a student who is particularly good at math, may sign up to be a math tutor.



(McLeod, 2007)

How does Maslow's Hierarchy Relate to Learning?

Maslow's Hierarchy is directly related to learning through motivation. In order for students to succeed in the classroom, they must be motivated to learn. When all levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs are met, students are at their full potential for learning (McLeod, 2007). For example, a student would not be able to enter a classroom with an empty stomach and the fear of dying from starvation and successfully learn. Each student has needs that must be met in order to maximize learning. The higher up in the hierarchy a student is, the more levels that are met, the better the motivation and therefore the more learning that the student will experience.

How Are Students With Exceptionalities Affected by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs?

Students with exceptionalities are especially affected by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. According to Norman Kunc, all children are children and all children need to feel a sense of belonging (Kunc, 1992). In order for students with exceptionalities to be motivated to learn, they must have a sense of belonging. Belonging, the third level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, may be difficult for students with exceptionalities to obtain because they may have learning or physical disabilities that may set them apart from their peers.

Mislabeled students

In many schools, students suffer with difficulty in school because basic needs of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs are not being met. These students are typically students of low-socioeconomic status. Because students of low-socioeconomic status are not learning at the same rate as their peers, they are often mislabeled as "learning disabled". Many times, however, these students are simply not having the lower levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs met (Faye, 1983). Many of these students may be too worried about when their next meal is or where they are going to sleep that night to even worry about what they are learning in school. It is important to separate true learning disabilities from students who just need to have their basic needs in life met in order to learn. By separating these two populations, the student's needs for learning can more easily be met by the district or teacher.

Theory in Application

As an educator, it will be important to consider Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs for every student in the classroom. It will, however, be even more important to specifically link Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, students with exceptionalities, and specific practices in the classroom.

Segregating students into special education classrooms will not provide a sense of belonging for students with exceptionalities in the school. For this reason, students should be included in the least restrictive environment possible. For example, a student who does poorly on English tests, should not be put into a separate special education classroom, but rather be put into a general education English classroom with the proper supports for that student to succeed. Universal Design is a great way to give students with exceptionalities a sense of belonging. Universal design allows a teacher to plan ahead of time to avoid any disasters for a student who has a physical or intellectual disability (Hall, 2012). For example, if a student in your classroom uses a wheel chair, it will be important to make the classroom as handicap accessible as possible before school even starts. This way, a student will feel "normal" because he or she will easily be able to maneuver through the classroom just like his or her peers.

Another way that universal design may be used is with students with IEPs. For example, if a student's IEP says that he or she requires a study guide three days in advance of an assessment, a study guide can be provided for all students and not just the student with the IEP. This way, all students will benefit, and the student with the exceptionality will never be different from his or her peers. By making each student the same, a student with an exceptionality will have a better sense of belonging.

A good educator will also recognize each individual student's strengths and help him or her to excel in those areas providing the student with a sense of worth. This relates specifically to the esteem level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Students with disabilities especially will need a sense of esteem. One way to do this in the classroom, is to provide differentiated instruction and also give several examples that may interest each student. Also, it may be possible to ask a specific question about a concept that you know the student is understanding well. This way, each student, even the students with exceptionalities, are participating in the class and receiving feedback.

Conclusion

Maslow's hierarchy provides a model for how students are motivated to learn. Without the bottom layer of the hierarchy met, students cannot reach the next level. Each level, once met, allows students the ability and motivation to learn. Each student can move up in the hierarchy with the proper support. Students with exceptionalities especially may need attention paid to the hierarchy. The biggest hindrance of students with exceptionalities is the lack of sense of belonging. Through several methods, students with exceptionalities can feel sense of belonging and then move up in the hierarchy.

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