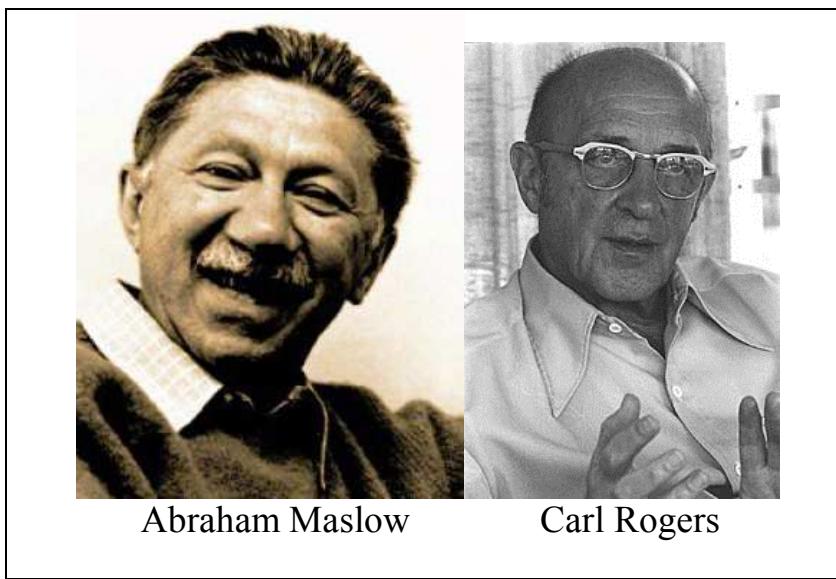


PROMOTING AND SUSTAINING MENTAL HEALTH

While many early psychologists studied “sick” people to see what made them sick, psychologists Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers studied healthy people to see what made them healthy. They were among the earliest pioneers in humanistic psychology from which humanistic learning theory is derived (see Chapter 15). Humanistic psychology (sometimes referred to as growth psychology or third wave psychology) begin to emerge in the 1950’s in response to the idea that humans were merely creatures driven by their subconscious (psychoanalytic model), or were organisms conditioned to respond to internal and external stimuli (behaviorist model). Instead, Maslow and Rogers posited that humans have a natural tendency toward psychological growth and emotional health as well as an innate desire to learn and to achieve their full potential. From this perspective, the purpose of education is to cultivate students’ natural tendencies so that they can realize their full potential.



Maslow's 15 Traits of Self-Actualizing Persons

According to Maslow, mentally healthy persons are self-actualizing persons (Maslow, 1968). *Self-actualization* is the process of coming to know and understand all parts of self and realizing one’s full potential on many different levels (Maslow, 1971). Maslow identified 15 traits or characteristics of self-actualizing persons:

1. Clear perception of reality. Self-actualizing persons perceives reality apart from biases, prejudices, stereotypes, or preconceived ideas and perceptions. Instead, they perceive each individual and experience objectively based, to the greatest extent possible, on the data presented. This allows for a clearer perception of reality.

2. Accepts self, others, and human nature. Self-actualizing persons have come to know all parts of self and have learned to accept both their strengths and weaknesses. While continually trying to improve, they do not spend a lot of time feeling shame, guilt, or regret about some aspect of their being or past actions. Instead, they recognize human nature, that all people have imperfections. This acceptance of themselves enables them to accept and appreciate others.

3. Spontaneous, simple, and natural. Self-actualizing persons are like children in that they behave naturally in accordance with their true nature and live in the moment. They are spontaneous, reacting to situations without pretense, without feeling the need to play a role. They’re open and honest in their emotions letting you see who they are. They don’t try to play a role or be something they’re not.

4. Focus on problems outside themselves. Self-actualizing persons are committed to some cause greater than themselves. They have a sense of mission which absorbs their energies.

5. Need for privacy, solitude, and independence. Self-actualizing people need privacy and solitude at times for self-reflection and to access their inner core for continued guidance and renewal.

6. Autonomous functioning. Self-actualizing people are not emotionally dependent on other people. They do not rely on other people for their happiness or need their approval. What they think about something is infinitely more important than what other people think of them. Thus, they are able to make their own decisions based on their values.

7. A continued freshness or appreciation of experiences. Self-actualizing people are able to appreciate certain experiences no matter how often they are repeated. For example, they can continue to appreciate a sunset, a summer day, a favorite meal, or good music, or children laughing and playing. As well, self-actualizing people continue to be thankful and appreciative for what they have and what they are able to experience.

8. Mystical or “peak” experiences. Self-actualizing people are able to experience moments of profound love, happiness, truth, or harmony. These can relate to mystical or religious experiences. They also occur when one is functioning at his or her highest. Athletes and musicians, after years of experience, report instances when they are functioning at their highest when time becomes distorted, where they become completely absorbed in a task, where they perceive their experience holistically. Here they are able to focus completely, with a limited field of attention and very high concentration.

9. Social interest. Self-actualizing people have a strong interest in giving to society and helping people. They see the connectedness of all living beings and feel empathy and affection for all humans.

10. Strong interpersonal relations. Self-actualizing people are capable of stronger relationships with others than are other persons. These relationships tend to be more intense and fewer in number than non-actualizing persons. They are capable of greater love, deeper friendship, and more complete identification with other individuals.

11. Egalitarian values. Self-actualizing persons believe in the equality and dignity of all people regardless of social class, level of education, ability, political or religious affiliation, race or color, or sexual orientation. They do not merely tolerate differences in others; they celebrate them.

12. Strong ethical sense. Self-actualizing persons have well-defined ethical and moral standards which are used to guide them. However, their standards may not be conventional. This is because they rely on self more than social convention or custom to determine right and wrong.

13. Spontaneous and playful sense of humor. The humor of self-actualizing persons tends not to be cutting, hurtful, or hostile; rather it is spontaneous, playful, conceptual, and philosophical. This type of humor is not always recognized or appreciated by all.

14. Creativeness. Self-actualizing people are original, inventive, and innovative. They are creative, but not always in an artistic sense. They are able to play with ideas, step outside the boundaries of perceived expectations, and think in new and innovative ways in order to solve problems or create products and performances.

15. Resistance to enculturation. Self-actualizing persons are able to resist social pressures to act and think in certain ways. They are not guided by convention or tradition. Instead, they are guided by their own tastes, standards, and ideas.

Rogers' Five Characteristics of a Fully Functioning Person

Rogers viewed the healthy personality not as a static state, but a process of continued self-actualizing. Self-actualizing persons have discovered who they are and are comfortable with their true self; thus, they do not need to hide behind masks or facades. Rogers has identified five traits of a fully functioning person:

1. An openness to experience. Fully functioning persons are not constrained by inhibiting worries of self-worth and are therefore free to try new things and to explore new ideas. Not having the defense mechanisms that others have, they are willing and able to experience a wider range of emotions, both positive and negative.

2. Existential living. Fully functioning persons are able to live in the moment. They do not try to make new experiences conform to fit their sense of self. They do not manipulate data to fit their belief system. They take the world as it is. They are changed by the moment. They don't try to change the moment. Fully functioning persons do not have to control and manipulate experiences and thus, can participate freely in them.

3. A trust in one's inner self. Fully functioning persons trust their intuition and emotions to help them make decisions, solve problems, or guide them through life. Rational and intellectual forces are still used, but these are put in the context of intuition. They make decisions and come to know the world using their whole

self, not just using logical and knowledge, but including emotion and intuition (see Chapter 10: four ways of knowing)

4. A sense of freedom. Fully functioning persons have fewer constraints or inhibitions. This provides a sense of freedom and a greater choice of thought and actions. They are willing to experiment with new ideas and to take risks. They don't feel directed by circumstance or past events. Fully functioning persons believe the future is dependent on them. This enables them to see many more options in life than a defensive person. This also provides a sense of control, self-determination, and self-efficacy.

5. Creativity. Like Maslow's self-actualizing persons, fully functioning persons are creative (see above). This creativity enables them to be spontaneous and cope with life changes, and to continue to evolve.

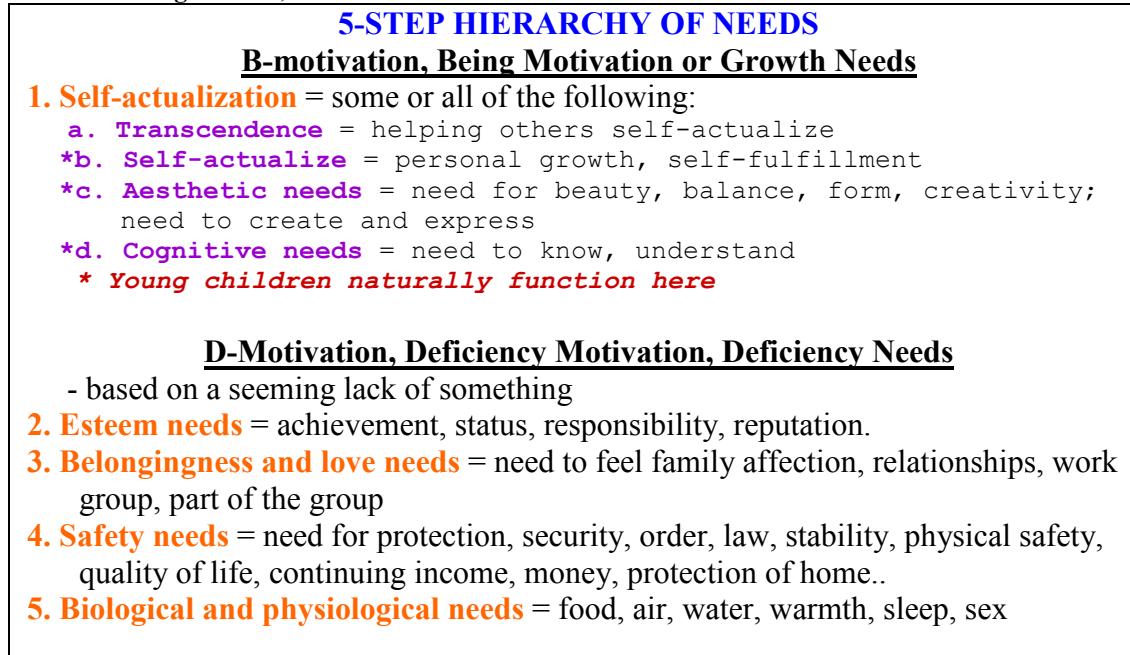
Nurturing Self-Actualizing Traits

As a classroom teacher you can help develop mentally healthy people by creating the conditions whereby some of these traits might be nurtured. The first step here is to identify those traits of import to you and begin to develop them within yourselves. Children learn what they live. Seeing these traits modeled on daily is an effective way to cultivate these traits within students. Modeling includes your physical actions, but also, teachers should engage in cognitive modeling. This is the process of thinking out loud as you are engaged in some problem solving or decision-making process.

Second, some of these traits can be developed through planned activities. For example, trait #1, clear perception of reality can be developed by using activities that identify the biases of self and others. Or, trait #12, strong ethical sense, you can engage in values clarification activities where student identify what they value. Or trait #14, creativeness, you can design activities and assignments that utilize the four types of creative thinking: fluency, flexibility, elaboration, and originality (see Chapter 9/10).

And finally, ensure that basic needs are met. Remember, according to Maslow, people have a natural inclination toward self-actualization. Self-actualization becomes stymied when there is a deficiency in meeting one of the lower needs. Thus, in the school and classroom we need to attend to and promote esteem, belongingness and community, safety and security (both emotional and physical), and biological and physical needs.

Figure 7.11, Maslow's hierarchy of needs.



Promoting Good Mental Health

The 12 recommendations in Figure 7.12 were taken from *An Educator's Guide to Children's Mental Health* published by the Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health (2010). These are ways to model and promote mental fitness within a classroom. Also, they are all attributes of the type of caring community that we would hope would be present in all K-12 classrooms

Figure 7.12. Modeling and promoting mental fitness

Modeling Mental Fitness
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Encourage children to talk about feelings - both their own and the feelings of others.2. Model appropriate problem-solving and conflict resolution strategies.3. Provide children with opportunities to practice thinking of solutions and anticipating consequences4. Help children identify and understand emotions they feel by giving a verbal label to emotional states.5. Encourage children to try new things by sharing and learning together.6. Watch for children's interests and suggest activities to support them.7. Provide children a safe place to experiment with their growing competence and independence.8. Provide opportunities for children to practice effective stress-reduction strategies. Even young children can learn deep breathing exercises.9. Help children practice listening and talking.10. Encourage children to help others.11. Help children understand and appreciate similarities and differences among people.12. Plan activities with the children that build a sense of belonging and community.

MENTAL HEALTH AND THE INNER CURRICULUM

Mental health issues can also be addressed proactively by inserting mental health-related activities and assignments into current curriculums. Called the inner curriculum, these are activities that address the inner life of students: their emotions, imagination, intuition, ideals, values, and psychological well-being (Johnson, 2007), and at the same time, they serve to reinforce academic objectives.

Elements of the Inner Curriculum

The inner curriculum addresses four elements:

1. *Intrapersonal*. This element involves students' emotions, and intuition. In dealing with emotions, students identify feelings then connect them to external events or situations. Intuition teaches students how to use their general impressions or sense of knowing apart from logic and emotion (see Chapter 9).

2. *Expressing the Intrapersonal*. Here students give expression to what is discovered in the intrapersonal element above. The arts are often used here. Music, dance, visual art, drama, poetry, and creative writing are all activities that can be used as separate curricular elements or inserted across the curriculum. Intrapersonal elements can also be expressed using bibliotherapy, analogies, metaphors, journal writing, and other written descriptions of students' inner exploration.

3. *Interpersonal*. This element involves understanding one's self in the context of a group, culture, or social setting. Activities here include social skills, cooperative group activities, teaching social skills, values clarification, moral dilemmas, and reading literature about students going through common problems and situations.

3. The Human Condition. Here students seek to know themselves in the context of humanity. The goal is to begin to understand what it is to be human and find similarities over time and across cultures. Comparisons using mythology, literature, and history are useful here.

Activities in the Inner Curriculum

One of the unique things about the inner curriculum is that it need not replace a curriculum already in place. Like a small glove inside a larger one, it can augment and enhance those things a teacher is already doing. Activities in the inner curriculum may involve creative dramatics, poetry, creative writing, art, music, dance, moral reasoning, problem solving, community service, books and literature, or simply silence. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to specific activities in each of these; however, activities associated with inner curriculum should have some or all of the following seven characteristics:

1. They are open ended. If the activity is truly part of the inner curriculum, students are not expected to come to a predetermined conclusion or to create a standardized product. Like life, there is no set answer. Students are allowed and even encouraged to come to their own conclusions. In creating or respond, they can take the idea as far as they want or, in turn, respond as minimally as they feel necessary.

2. They are meaningful. Assignments and activities are not created to keep students busy, to have them demonstrate their knowing, or to get a nice, dispersion of scores. Rather, activities are designed to increase understanding or to move students forward. Students are able to connect with the activity on a personal level. Homework is seen here, not as a measuring device, but as practice of things that have already been learned in class (Brophy, 1986). For example, after reading a chapter in a social studies text, the regular curriculum might have students do some sort of worksheet to reinforce ideas or to gage their comprehension. In the inner curriculum the teacher would say, "*Find an idea that you find interesting. Describe it using words, pictures, or some other form, then tell us how it might touch your life.*"

3. They connect with students' lives. These activities try to make connections with students' inner or outer life. For example, after reading a story, students might be asked to describe similar feelings, events, characters, or situations from their own lives. In a science lesson students might be directed to see how a concept touches their lives or to take an imaginary trip somewhere and describe what they see, feel, and hear.

4. They promote a greater understanding of self. One of the goals of the inner curriculum is to examine those parts of ourselves that have been ignored. This is done in order to begin to recognize why we think and feel as we do. In this way we can eventually free ourselves unconscious forces.

5. They promote a greater understanding of others. When students are able to look beyond surface differences they are able to see the great commonality in the human experience, one that transcends time, geography, race, ethnicity, society, status, and religions. This deeper look helps them to connect with others in a more meaningful way with others. They ask not why, but why.

6. They allow students share their ideas with others. Here students thinking, creating, and doing not just for the teacher, but for a variety of audiences. Dramas are created and performed in other classrooms. Writing projects are shared and eventually turned into class books. Students are asked to respond to the ideas of others. You see cooperative learning and students talking with other students. Students are encouraged to turn to a neighbor to get help or to share an idea.

7. They recognize multiple ways to demonstrate knowing. In traditional curriculums, knowledge is demonstrated by taking a test or writing a report. Activities in the spiritual curriculum realize that people are able to express their knowledge and understand in a variety of ways. For example, students may create dramas demonstrating important concepts, use art, photography, give a speech, use dance or creative movement, use music, dress up as a character and recreate important events, or create a video. Imagine in a science class, important concepts represented using sculpture or visual in art, set to music, and presented to other students in a video or slide presentation. (For those pragmatists, I do not recommend doing these kinds of things all the time.)

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