

# An application of abraham maslow's hierarchy of needs to carl rogers 10 principle...

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## An application of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to Carl Rogers 10 Principles of Learning

### Introduction

The objective of this paper is to explore the relevance of applying Maslow's hierarchy of needs to the 10 principles of learning put forward by Carl Rogers in 'Freedom to Learn' (1969).

Rogers was one of the founders of the humanistic approach to psychotherapy and he was also a fervent educationalist. 'Freedom to Learn' (Rogers, 1969) and 'Freedom to Learn for the 80's' (Rogers, 1983) were both a direct challenge to the education system in the United States. His introduction starts: 'Our education system is, I believe, failing to meet the needs of our society' (Rogers, 1983).

He questioned those who were saying 'We must tell children what is right and wrong, that we must teach and they must follow' (Rogers, 1983). He noted that large and powerful groups were insisting that students must not read certain books and believed teachers operated in a climate of fear, unable to encourage children to grow to their full potential. The very title 'Freedom to Learn' was a statement of discontent with the system.

Maslow, in contrast to looking at the educational system, focused on the individual. His theory of human motivation was published towards the end of the World War II (1943). Maslow was heavily influenced by Freud (but did not consider himself a Freudian). In simple terms, Maslow took an optimistic view of life in contrast to Freud's pessimism.

Maslow's views in many ways mirrored Jung and Adler but again, he did not consider himself a Jungian or an Adlerian. He formed his own theory that all humans are motivated to achieve their true potential providing that their basic psychological needs are met.

He took a holistic view of life that the human creature begins as a kind of acorn, with all the characteristics of a fully grown tree inside it. His theory of human motivation became known as Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

In this essay I point out the congruence of the two psychologists' theories - Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Rogers' 10 principles of learning.

What is learning? 'Human beings have a natural potential for learning' (Rogers first principle, 1969). Rogers (1994) puts learning along a continuum, whereby at one end learning is not experiential and there is little or no meaning, with 'syllables' quickly forgotten. At the other end, 'significant, meaningful experiential learning' occurs. A very simple explanation of the two would be, one can read a book on swimming or, talk to a coach, but until any meaningful experiential work has taken place (i. e. one gets into the water) learning will not commence.

Rogers furthered his argument by saying that the education system had traditionally thought of learning as an orderly type of cognitive, left-brain activity which could be measured, ranked and ordered. However in his view, if a student is conditioned or even forced under threat to learn in this way then he may be capable of 'regurgitating' knowledge but not necessarily understanding it. Rogers believed that also utilising the right side of the brain was required in order to involve the whole person in the learning

process. This would appear to be a more complete understanding of learning.

Maslow stated that theory separated from experience and practice could be very dangerous. ' On the other hand, the practical person who does not understand theory is also handicapped'(Goble, 1970). It is clear Maslow supports Rogers view of experiential learning.

Our Basic Needs

Maslow perceived the human as driven, motivated and propelled by potent forces and called these forces human needs: ' Human needs arrange themselves in hierarchies of pre-potency, that is to say the appearance of one need usually rests on the prior satisfaction of another, more pre-potent need. Man is a perpetually wanting animal' (Maslow, 1943). He also added that no need or drive could be treated as if it were isolated or discrete and that every drive was related to the state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the other drives.

Maslow presented his theory of motivation as a pyramid-like structure covering five levels of need; psychological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and - at the pinnacle - self-actualisation. The psychological needs are somatic (i. e. they relate to the body not the mind) and as such are not strictly motivated actions. Maslow defines the somatic drives as: air, food, water, sex and secretion. Once the somatic drives are met, motivated drives will follow.

Significantly, Maslow was the first to expound the premise that learning can only commence once the psychological needs have been satisfied and that

at least part of each stage of learning must be achieved before progressing up the pyramid.

He was particularly concerned that once the basic needs have been met, children need to 'learn to be responsible for each other, to care for each other, not only for the sake of others but for their own sake' (Goble, 1970).

Maslow also believed there was no fast track route to self-actualisation and that learning could slip backwards if circumstances changed. For example, the child when frightened clings to his mother or the child berated by parents for not getting the grades brings fear and insecurity, leaving him to scurry anxiously back down the stairs to relative safety and security.

With the above point in mind let us continue our focus on Rogers' principles and explore where there are similarities in approach. 'Those learnings which are threatening to the self are more easily perceived and assimilated when external threats are at a minimum' (Rogers' fourth principle, 1969). Conversely when external threats are present, learning stops and we seek safety and comfort.

Rogers' example is of a boy with reading difficulties being forced to read aloud in class and then ridiculed by his peers. Another would be the school bully who exploits the weaknesses of their classmates. This stops learning and may even lead to retreat to a lower level of Maslow's hierarchy where such threats are at a minimum. Life has changed considerably. Special needs schools and provision within schools for dyslexia and the less able are further examples.

' When threat to the self is low, experience can be perceived in differentiated fashion and learning can proceed' (Rogers' fifth principle, 1969). It is this point that also underpinned Rogers humanistic approach to psychotherapy.

He, the teacher, facilitator and the therapist must have: regard to the serious and meaningful problem, he must demonstrate congruence, show unconditional positive regard to his client or student and give empathic understanding. While I have condensed these four significant statements into a single sentence, together, they form part of the foundation stones of Rogers Humanistic and Person-centered approach to learning and understanding.

Following these foundation stones has enabled many teachers, managers and therapist alike to help facilitate learning and assist the student or client reach the third level of Maslow's hierarchy, love and belonging.

Maslow stated that love was not to be confused with sex which is a psychological need. He likened Carl Rogers' definition of love to ' that of being deeply understood and deeply accepted' (Goble, 1970). He rejected Freud's tendency to assert that love derived from sex. Maslow also felt the absence of love stifled growth. Crucially both Rogers and Maslow saw love and acceptance as a pivotal point in both learning and the path to self discovery.

Humans who reach this stage carry with them an awareness of life. I have introduced Carl Jung (1955) as he described this awareness or imprint as containing: ones collective unconscious, their personal unconscious (which includes social conditioning) and their ego.

It is likely that this presents the most difficult stage in the learning process. ' Learning which involves a change in self organization in the perception of oneself is threatening and tends to be resisted '(Rogers' third principle, 1969).

There is a whole new genre of ' self help' books designed to address this very challenge. A simple example, ' It is through the pain of confronting and resolving problems that we learn' (Scott Peck, 1983). The writings of Aldous Huxley, Eckhart Toll and Ken Wilber are but a few of the many teachers who's books have assisted parents, students and clients alike take the next step from love and acceptance to self-esteem along Maslow's hierarchy.

To change ones perception of life is for many the first stage of determining just what ' self' represents. Early adulthood is often a time to challenge parents, religious beliefs and much of the social conditioning one has accepted as ' truth' for much of one's life.

Once the student/client can believe in him/herself, be willing to break through past conditioning, great discovery and learning is possible. ' Significant learning takes place when the subject matter is perceived by the student as having relevance for his own purposes... and [when] relevant to the goal, learning takes place with great rapidity' (Rogers' second principle, 1969). Maslow would appear to concur. His concept of the ' peak experience', a moment of oneness with self and the universe is a breakthrough moment in the journey. To have such a moment and rush to a higher level of existence is a ' moment of selfactualisation without the recipient becoming self actualised' (Maslow, 1970). It does provide a key motivator to continue.

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These peak experiences motivate and provide renewed energy and confidence, ' Much significant learning is acquired by doing' (Rogers' sixth principle, 1969). As the student grows, motivated by peak experiences, feeling safe and solving problems are an effective builder of self-esteem.

Maslow extended his ideas in later years and found that people have two ' categories' of esteem needs; self-esteem and esteem from other people. It was the development of esteem from others which caused concern to Maslow in his later life and its impact upon his hierarchy. Even up to his death in 1970 he was reformulating and refining his opinions of the concept of self-actualisation. He held the view, esteem for many had become the only or most important goal. He believed the individual who allows his desires to distort his perception of self, diminishes his psychological health.

This concurred with Rogers' ninth principle, ' Independence, creativity and self-reliance are all facilitated when self criticism and self-evaluation are basic and evaluation by others is of secondary importance'(1969). Rogers' eighth principle makes a similar point, ' Self-initiated learning which involves the whole person of the learner - feelings as well as intellect, is the most lasting and pervasive' (1969). In the current economic climate, status and esteem from others appears to be the ultimate goal for many. Maslow noted, ' The commonly seen hatred or resentment of or jealousy of goodness, truth, beauty... is largely... determined by threat of loss of self-esteem' (Maslow 1968). As such, self criticism and evaluation by others will be resisted, the very opposite of Rogers' ninth principle. ' and evaluation by others is of secondary importance' (1969).



Openness to such higher learning requires responsibility. ' Learning is facilitated when the student participates responsibly in the learning process' (Rogers' seventh principle, 1969). The opinions of Maslow would indicate protection of self-worth, ego and opinion of others to block a willingness to continue learning. At this stage the student/client remains at the level of esteem or may even retreat down the hierarchical stairs for love and comfort.

Maslow saw rising above esteem to self actualisation as the most difficult steps to climb. He believed that even if all the lower needs are met, a new discontent and restlessness will follow unless ' the individual is doing what he is fitted for... if he is to be ultimately happy' (Maslow 1943). This statement dovetails perfectly into Rogers' tenth and last of his principles:- ' The most socially useful learning in the modern world is the learning of the process of learning, a continuous openness to experience and incorporation into oneself of the process of change'.

### Conclusion

Having applied Maslow's hierarchy of needs to Rogers ten principles, I am able to see the obvious synergy, the seamless way that all learning must follow the five stages of needs and the benefit to any education system that using his theory of motivation would bring.

Maslow's basic needs could therefore underpin an education syllabus that teaches everyone (rich and poor) that we live on a planet of limited resources for food, water and the energy to provide shelter and warmth.

Maslow has always called for freedom to speak, freedom to do what one wishes as long as no harm is done to others. In his later life Maslow questioned his theory that if the entire human species is growth orientated, why do so many fail to reach their full potential?

He concluded that there was an innate human tendency towards inertia, which he explained as being psychological - the need for rest and recovery and to conserve energy. Perhaps he saw an unsustainable world, tired and exhausted, the body scrambling down his hierarchy to a place of safety. I think so. The tired exhausted body retreats, takes shortcuts. Add to this recession, political uncertainty and fear. Ultimately we remove our freedom to learn and indeed our freedom to reach our highest natural potential.

A combination of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Rogers 10 Principles of Learning provide the perfect templates for a 21st century education system. Clear for all who wish to embrace it.