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Teaching the Whole Child

When Discipline Issues Are
Emotional Issues

Teaching the Whole Student:
Maslow Means Middle School

Social Inclusion: It's Our Middle School, Too

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Teaching the Whole Student: Maslow Means Middle School

By Paul D. Deering, John McAleese, Joy R. Hannah,
and Doug McLean

Remember psychologist Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs? Maslow used the term *hierarchy* because humans address their needs in order from lowest to highest (Figure 1). A deficit at a lower level precludes all but highly motivated, mature humans from focusing on a higher need.

Maslow differentiated between the lower-level *Deficit Needs* and higher-level *Being Needs*. *Deficit Needs* preoccupy us when they are unmet, but drop off the radar screen when satisfied. In contrast, *Being Needs* become a growing focus once we begin to address them; the more we get, the more we want.

Sad to say, many middle grades schools have overemphasized the "achievement" component of Maslow's fourth level to the point of losing sight of all other adolescent/human needs.

However, three intermediate schools in New Zealand realize that *Maslow means middle school* and have used his hierarchy to ensure they address *all* levels of adolescent needs.

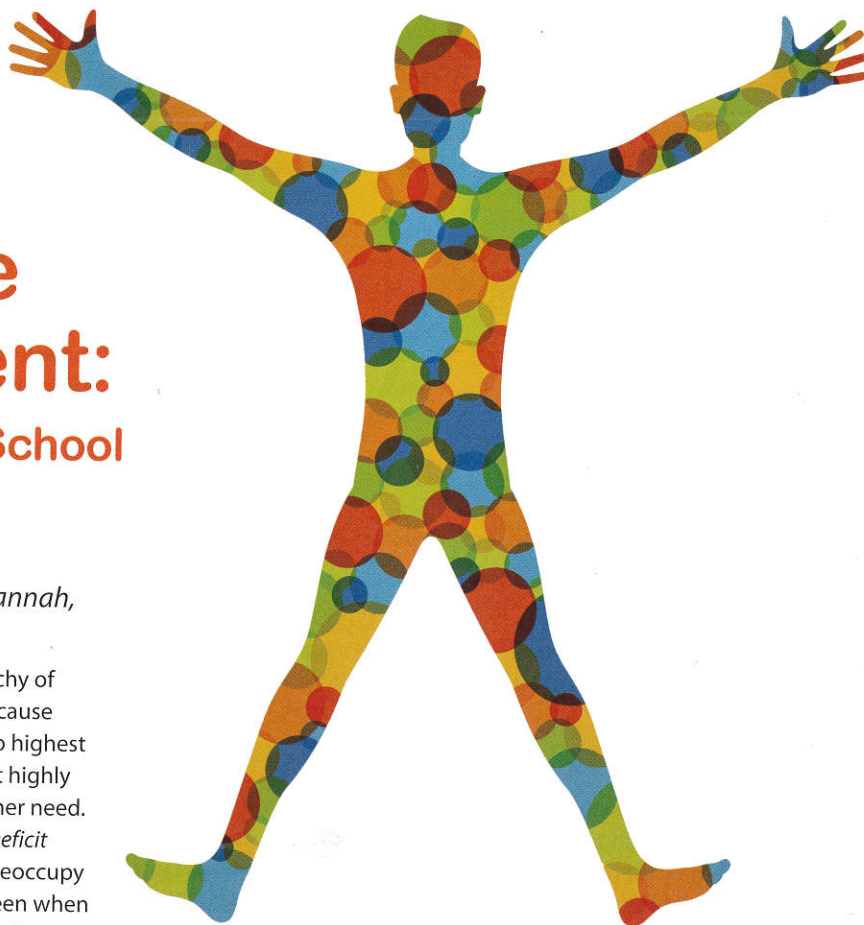
- Howick Intermediate School, located in suburban Auckland, serves 800 students, many of Asian ancestry/nationality. The school is rated Decile 7. (Deciles denote socioeconomic status, with Decile 1 indicating the lowest level and Decile 10 the highest.)

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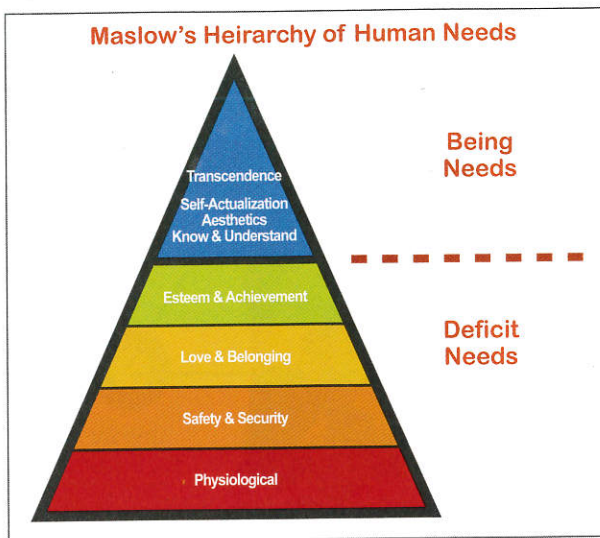
- Rutherford Intermediate School, located in Wanganui, enrolls 325 students, about one-third of whom are Maori. This school is Decile 2.
- Whakatane Intermediate School, located on the Bay of Plenty, serves 600 students, about 50% of whom are Maori. This school is Decile 4.

Physiological Needs: Let's Get Physical!

Young adolescents are fascinated with and horrified by their bodies. Fortunately, each of these Kiwi schools helps their students understand—and use—their changing bodies. At Rutherford, students may focus their curriculum in one of several academies, including the Academy of Sport. Whakatane offers 23 different intramural and intermural sports, including surfing. Howick offers dozens of physical activities, including swimming lessons. Each school also offers outdoor education, which addresses all of Maslow's levels.

Each school serves the full range of young adolescents' physical and health needs. The late bloomers, less physically inclined, and special needs students all participate in physical education, outdoor education, and intramural sports.

Figure 1



Adapted from: Telljohann, Wolford Symons, & Pateman, B. (2004).
Note: In some of his work Maslow split the components of the Being Needs into separate levels, and in others they are combined, as presented here.

These schools support healthy living with low-fat, low-sugar offerings in their cafeterias and cooking classes. Students carry water bottles so their bodies and brains are properly hydrated. They are kept awake and engaged with active learning—busy hands and busy mouths. And all three schools have flexible, indestructible furniture that fits the myriad shapes, sizes, and energy levels of adolescent bodies.

Each Kiwi school emphasizes healthy decision making across the curriculum. This includes smart decisions about what to eat, a realistic sense of body image, and protection from the sun. And each school uses a whole-staff approach to nurturing and guiding students that ensures that youngsters' problems are noticed promptly and that intervention by counselors or other specialists is arranged as needed.

Safety and Security: Am I OK Here?

Young adolescents have particular challenges in the area of safety and security, thanks to their uncoordinated bodies and under-construction brains. Healthy decision making and a nurturing environment are systematized at the Kiwi schools with homeroom teachers who are the "good shepherds" in "pastoral care" ("advisory" in the United States).

A primary goal is to help students learn to deal with challenges like peer pressure, conflict, rumors, and media manipulation. The pastoral care teacher becomes the go-to person in the inevitable teen crises: I have the biggest zit in the world; my girlfriend dumped me; I missed my period...

Another way these schools ensure safety is through smaller, more personal groupings of teachers and students—teams, academies, syndicates, *whanau* (Maori, for extended family)—which operate as a supportive community. Composed of fewer than 100 students, this provides a safe haven where students, teachers, and families get to know each other well. Team teachers are in a position to know when a student needs a pat on the back or to be called on the carpet.

Each of these Kiwi schools "catches 'em being good," with regular recognition of good citizenship. Rutherford frames this strategy with Sean Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens*. Each school also has graduated levels of intervention, support, and reasonable consequences for inappropriate behavior, with an emphasis on helping the students analyze their actions and learn to make better choices more often.

The sports programs at the schools, combined with their many other clubs and activities, offer students and their families a wonderful array of safe, supervised out-of-school options to counterbalance the risks associated with prolonged unsupervised time.

Love and Belonging—Can I Join In?

Young adolescents long to be part of a group of peers. Nevertheless, polls indicate that the greatest influences on teens are not Paris Hilton, 50 Cent, or sports stars, but parents. Educators at Howick, Whakatane, and Rutherford actively reach out to their parents and communities.

Perhaps the next most important affiliation after the family is one's cultural or ethnic group. Each Kiwi school provides opportunities to strengthen this connection and to learn about other cultures. Whakatane offers a Maori immersion syndicate with much of the school day focused on the language and culture of New Zealand's indigenous people. Rutherford and Howick offer Maori curriculum as well; all three provide a veritable United Nations of cultural arts and language opportunities.

Adolescents' susceptibility to peer influence carries risk, but also the opportunity to make it cool to be a good kid. School uniforms help reduce some of the pressure on Kiwi adolescents to conform to expensive, risqué, or gang-related fashion trends.

Positive relationships are promoted via the pastoral care programs, teaming, and social events, and responsible behavior is promoted with disciplinary policies so harassment and intolerance are prevented.

Teachers at all three schools further capitalize on adolescents' social nature with peer tutoring and group projects and presentations.

Finally, the other component of this level of the hierarchy must be addressed: love. With adolescents' hormones saying *Yes*, and their brains saying *What?*, it is essential to help them learn about healthy sexuality. These schools' curricula include discussions about the place of sexuality

in a fulfilling life and the importance of age-appropriate decisions, safeguards, and consequences. Research clearly has shown that such comprehensive sex education results in onset of sexual activity at a later age and increased use of precautions upon becoming active.

Esteem and Achievement—What Do I Do Well?

The practices described here also address esteem and achievement needs—indeed, they are the platform on which achievement is built. Young adolescents want to learn and to improve their abilities in lots of ways, but this must be tied to experiences and interests—stuff we can touch or see or already know something about. So teachers at these Kiwi schools build scaffolds between students and curriculum, with active, student-directed learning.

At Howick and Rutherford, students collaborate with their parents to identify personal strengths and goals to ensure that their program of studies is appropriate; this culminates with student-led conferences. At Whakatane, students learn in multidimensional modes. They explore biotechnology production, fashion design, community service, food technology, electronics, speechmaking, performing arts, technology intensives, and more. There are no idle hands here!

The tremendous variety of co-curricular offerings at each of these schools is right in tune with young adolescents' sporadic discovery of new interests and abilities. By addressing all of Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences, the schools ensure that students progress to adulthood with a full-service brain after all the neural pruning of adolescence. The schools provide diverse and challenging opportunities to *all* young adolescents rather than placing them into perceived "ability groups" based on tests or other fallible measures.

Finally, young adolescents need to develop a realistic, solid sense of self-esteem—to know what they do well, what they need to work on, and to feel that this is okay and possible—a far cry from the mindless, *feel good* mantra of pop psychology. All three of these Kiwi intermediate schools help students set realistic goals, work hard to attain them, self-assess their progress, and present and use their products.

Transcendence—What Does It All Mean?

So what? This phrase is an adolescent mantra, but it reflects their drive to find meaning or purpose, not chronic disinterest. And again, it is crucial to gear education to this level in order to ensure that the adolescent brain solidifies the circuitry needed for a full life.

As the Dalai Lama said, "If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion." Educators at Whakatane, Howick, and Rutherford not only treat their students compassionately, they explicitly teach this value. They capitalize on adolescents' argumentativeness by helping students tackle

real-world problems, connecting them with something bigger than themselves. By focusing on moral issues—the *So what?* (Bloom's *Evaluation* level)—the youngsters *want* and *need* the knowledge and skills mandated in the curriculum, whether to help the economically disadvantaged, save the whales, or turn an empty lot into a park.

Further connection to values and aesthetics is promoted at each Kiwi school through their myriad literary, visual, and performing arts opportunities. They provide access to Maslow's peak experience, or transcendence, where one is transported to a euphoric sense of oneness with the beauty of existence and with a H/higher P/power.

Another transcendent aspect of these schools is their support for connection with cultural identity, as described earlier. There is an enormous sense of pride and responsibility when one feels connected to a people, to an *iwi* (Maori for clan), with a history, a future, and a present. In addition, the study of other languages and cultures helps students connect with other peoples and to see the beauty and universalities in humanity.

Experiences like these become a "positive addiction"—Maslow's *Self-Actualization*.

Whole Students—Holistic Education

Parents have long known that you ignore youngsters' *deficit* needs at your own peril. Tired kids are justifiably unhappy and will not—cannot—pay attention to what you are saying. Scared kids have only safety on their minds. Kids without friends or a group are preoccupied with a gnawing in their gut. Kids who don't have opportunities to take on exciting, realistic challenges in a supportive environment just won't try anything. And without a sense of a bigger purpose, we are all doomed to lethargy, substance abuse, and worse.

Educators at these three Kiwi intermediate schools see beyond the myopia of so many schools that try to focus exclusively on Maslow's *Esteem and Achievement* level—actually, only *Achievement*. *We're here to teach the students, not to show them a good time, make them feel good, parent them.*

The purposeful, holistic/whole-child education at Howick, Rutherford, and Whakatane intermediate schools, and their constant efforts to improve, are helping to develop the full potential of every young adolescent so that they grow into the kind of adults we would like to have as our doctors, teachers, and neighbors some day. 