

Human Needs and Tendencies

Submitted to:

Jeri Grant-Miller

Center for Contemporary Montessori Programs

June 27, 2007

Human behavior is driven by the needs inherent to our existence. A need is a requirement that must be met in order to ensure survival and growth. Human needs are classified into two different categories. The first category is that of the physical needs of a human in order to ensure survival. These needs include food, clothing, shelter, and protection from harm. Our physical needs are tangible, and tend to be egocentric in nature. The other category of human needs is that of spirituality; needs such as religion, embellishment, love, art, and trust. Needs that are spiritual in nature provide us with the fuel we require to grow as people, and seek our own paths in life. Spiritual needs tend to be intangible, and bigger than one's self. When looking at the needs of people, and most certainly children, we must remember that physical needs and spiritual needs are of equal importance. They provide a balanced framework for the healthy and natural growth of all people. In order to create and support diverse individuals and diversity within our society, we must openly share these needs with the children that fall within the scope of our daily lives.

A concept often confused with a need is that of a want. Wants are things that we crave, but are not vital for our survival. I have often felt that living in Winona means that I need a fishing boat, but in truth, it is really a want. My survival does not depend on the ownership of a boat, even though I would really love one!

Humans are also empowered or enabled by their tendencies. Children are born with certain predispositions that drive their behavior, and are inherent to human nature. These tendencies motivate children to engage in activities that will aid them in reaching their full human potential. Educational practices should embrace the distinct

personalities that children are born with, and guide them down their own path of life.

There are four basic tendencies from which we act. The first is the tendency to explore. Children explore the world around them with their senses. They explore to construct inner knowledge of their universe by experiencing their environment through interacting with it directly. These interactions will be the foundation upon which they construct their understanding of life. The second basic tendency is that of orientation. According to Maria Montessori (2003) the “child’s sensibility to order has two simultaneous aspects; the outer, which concerns relations between the parts of his environment, the inner, which gives him a sense of the parts of his body, their movements and position. This latter aspect we may call inner orientation (p. 55). The outer orientation is a reference to the relationship between the child and the environment that the child interacts with. The inner orientation speaks to a relationship within the child’s body, pertaining to the coordination of the mind and the muscular system with regard to movement. Movements can be executed, memorized, and repeated due to the inner orientation of the child. A love of order is the third tendency born into humanity. This love of order is the basis for the mathematical minds development. The idea of “a place for everything, and everything in its place” stems from this love of order. If an element in the child’s environment is out of order, they tend to react very strongly, until the environment is set back into the proper order. Once able, a child will demonstrate this love of order by placing things that are out of order back into their correct locations. The drive for order in a child’s universe will allow that child to become oriented in their environment. This is the reason that a child’s environment must be maintained in an orderly fashion by the

adult. Disorder leads to disorientation, which will lead to deviations in behavior. A prepared environment will allow for the proper exploration, orientation, and order that a child needs to construct themselves in their quest to become fulfilled human beings. These will also lead to the development of the fourth basic human tendency; that of communication.

Communication is both a need and a tendency. All people have the need to form relationships with other people. These relationships are formed by interacting with other people and participating in functions that are social in nature. The ability to communicate makes possible cooperation, collaboration, and the passing of knowledge between individuals. The language that the child will use to communicate is a product of the culture that the child lives in, and is developed through the interactions of the child and its environment, which includes the people involved in that environment. This reflects the universality of children's ability to acquire language.

Humans also have intellectual tendencies. The first of which is that of a reasoning mind. We have the ability to think, question, solve problems, and learn from our experiences. The ability to build upon our thoughts gives us the ability to create meaning for ourselves. Another tendency is the ability to abstract. Abstraction is the separating of characteristics from the physical environment within which we exist. Color is an example of an abstract idea. We may be able to see, and pick up a purple crayon. The color purple itself, however, is an abstract characteristic of that crayon. Imagination is another intellectual tendency. The ability to picture objects, people, or places in our minds without those things being physically present, yet based in reality is the power of

imagination. This power enables us to change our environment to suit our needs and tendencies, and gives us the ability to adapt to new situations as they occur in our lives. The fourth intellectual tendency is that of the mathematical mind. This mathematical mind is the driving force behind the inventive nature that is inherent in the human race. This tendency drives us in our pursuit of precision, accuracy, and logical thought. It is this mathematical mind that aids in the abstractions that allow us to create through imagination and invention.

As humans, we also have creative tendencies. One of these is the urge to work. This drives us to manipulate our environment with our hands to meet the desires of our minds, and to make real the ideas that our imaginations present. A young child's work is driven by the need for exploration, which allows him to construct his mind through manipulating his surroundings. This work will help the child to become an independent being, free to choose, move and repeat those things that they deem desirable. Another creative tendency is that of repetition. The repeating of work or activities is done in an attempt to attain knowledge, develop the habit of perseverance, and to strive for perfection by working through our own mistakes. This repetition leads to perfection of a task, which enables the child to concentrate on his/her chosen task.

The role of the adult is to prepare a child's environment so that the needs and tendencies of that child will be met. In order to meet these needs/tendencies, the adult must understand them. The child should be supported in a holistic manner, taking into account the physical, intellectual, and spiritual needs and tendencies needed to develop into a whole person. The prepared environment must aid the child in the quest to

construct him/herself as an independent entity in the universe. Independence is always the goal of education, as the goal of education is to function as an aid to life.

References

Grant-Miller, J. (2007, Summer). *Human needs and tendencies*. EDUC 614: St. Paul, MN: College of St. Catherine.

Montessori, M. (2003). *The Secret of Childhood*. Hyderabad, India: Orient Longman Private Limited.