

Maslow Application  
KSP 602: Assignment #3  
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Maslow's hierarchy of human needs is an interesting theory to apply to our field experience observations. Riverbend Academy (RBA) provides for and accommodates students in numerous ways. I will discuss some of the motivational needs that I have observed RBA helping its students meet, and also some of those needs that are not being sufficiently met.

RBA is an alternative school, and many of its students come from rough backgrounds and non-traditional families. To meet its student's physiological needs, the school offers a free and reduced lunch program to those who qualify, even though it does not have its own cafeteria at the school. The school also aims to meet other student needs by allowing students to freely use the restroom and take drink breaks as needed simply by taking the hallway pass from the classroom. Also, students are allowed to make requests regarding the room temperature, which allows students to be comfortable when they are in school.

Like other schools, RBA has a strict zero-tolerance weapon rule, and signs are posted at every entrance to inform and remind students and visitors of this rule. This is one measure used to help meet student's safety needs. The school also rehearses and times its emergency procedures so that every student is aware of the procedures and is able to respond in a quick and safe way. On a classroom level, instructors aim to control classroom behaviors in a non-threatening and non-judgmental way. Although these are all practical and important aspects of meeting student's safety needs, the school also lacks in some areas. For instance, expectations for student behavior and achievement are not consistent for all enrolled students, and because the students work on self-paced individual projects during the day, students are rarely given praise, only made aware of when they are doing something wrong.

In the area of love and belonging, the RBA staff has the opportunity to focus on students individually. Teachers use one-on-one instruction for math and in assisting students with their individual projects. Students receive some feedback when they are in these one-on-one meeting times. Another unique element of the RBA structure is their use of “circle time” in the morning when students first arrive at school. This is an opportunity for students to “check in” and let the instructor and class know how they are feeling, share things that happened the previous day or over the weekend, and have large group discussions on various topics. Although most students seem uninterested at eight o’clock in the morning, it is a chance for students to share important things going on in their lives and to be accepted by other students and the instructor. Again, I feel that RBA could improve in some areas to help students meet their love and belonging needs. For instance, students are not given a chance to work together on projects or math assignments, even if they are in the same lesson. Also, students are rarely given the opportunity to be a leader in the classroom, and I think this is an issue of trust. Because these students do come from rough backgrounds, I feel that several teachers assume the worst all of the time, rather than giving the students a chance to prove that they are trustworthy.

There are areas of esteem and aesthetic needs that RBA also attempts to nurture. For instance, student move through their projects and math lessons at their own pace. This allows students who really understand a topic to move on to more challenging items, and students who need more practice or instruction are given a chance to work longer without feeling like they are behind the rest of their classmates. There is a negative side to this style of learning as not all students are self-motivated to complete work, and there are no other learning strategies being demonstrated. Students are also able to decide what individual projects they will complete to meet the graduation requirements. Although there are some specifications for certain projects to

meet graduation standards, most students are given no limit as to topic choice as long as they can explain what they will learn and how it will apply towards a specific requirement. The school also has designed an award program called “Get Caught” that rewards and acknowledges students for the good things they do. Unfortunately, not all students demonstrate respect for the other students in the classroom, and often times the instructor does not correct the situation. This leaves students feeling down about themselves and their situation.

Finally, although self-actualization is something that most people will never fully develop, I believe people see hints of it in different activities. This is true at RBA as well. Educators at RBA expect students to complete projects, log their hours for each project with detail (which is how they determine credit), and do their best. They encourage this while allowing students to study interesting topics on their own and present their findings in creative ways. Unfortunately, not all students grasp how these things will apply to their lives as a whole, and as I mentioned earlier, they are not always motivated to actually complete projects. Many students at RBA have not completed enough credits for their current grade level and therefore may not graduate on-time with their peers.

Riverbend Academy is a unique school catering to unique students. Although most of my observations have been completed during math class, which is all self-paced individual study, I have observed many interesting behaviors and reactions to different situations. I have seen students and the teacher having good days and bad days. I have seen the teacher react to similar situations in different ways. I have seen different expectations held for different students, and watched many students sleep through math class. I have also seen students grow and understand new topics. I have seen light-bulbs go on in a student’s head and newfound motivation to complete tasks. I have seen students overcome frustration, and talk about

difficulties they face in their lives. Finally, I have learned that being a teacher puts you in a place to challenge and help others meet their individual motivational needs at various levels of Maslow's hierarchy.

Although RBA does meet most of the motivational needs near the bottom of Maslow's hierarchy, in order to move more students toward self-actualization, I believe the school needs to start setting higher expectations for all its students, and expect the same behavior from all students as well. Also, I believe that there needs to be more praise in the classroom so that students are encouraged to keep learning and progressing on their projects. Finally, I believe the school needs to offer opportunities for students to work together and encourage each other, allowing them the chance to develop leadership skills and positive peer relations. Although these are not the only things that can be done to help motivate students to move up Maslow's hierarchy, I believe these few things would help more students move towards self-actualization.