**Abraham Maslow**

**The Self-Actualised Person and the Hierarchy of Needs**

Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) was an American psychologist whose theory of motivation has had significant influence in adult education. Maslow set out to investigate the characteristics of the fully rounded, healthy personality and from this he developed a theory of motivation in which he set out to describe the powerful goals which drive people’s behaviour. This is known as Maslow’s ‘hierarchy of needs’ and it describes five sets of needs: physiological, safety, love, esteem and self actualisation.

**Basic needs:** physiological, i.e. hunger, thirst, sex, sleep, bodily functions

**Safety:** physical safety, protection from harm, order, predictability, reliability **Love**: Intimacy, affection, friendship, sense of belonging

**Esteem**: Respect for self, confidence, independence; esteem of others, reputation, status **Self**-**actualisation**: achieving potential, being all that you can be, doing what you are meant to do.

**The essence of Maslow’s theory is that the emergence of one set of needs as a motivator for behaviour depends on the more basic needs being satisfied first.**

*“For the man who is extremely and dangerously hungry, no other interests exist but food. It is quite true that man lives by bread alone -- when there is no bread. But what happens to man's desires when there is plenty of bread and when his belly is chronically filled?*

*At once other (and 'higher') needs emerge and these, rather than physiological hungers, dominate the organism. And when these in turn are satisfied, again new (and still 'higher') needs emerge and so on”.* Maslow, A.H. (1943).

The possibility of meeting these needs depends on certain pre-conditions being met. The person must have certain freedoms, such as the freedom to speak, to investigate and seek information and to defend the self, as well as justice and order.

In addition to being motivated by the five sets of needs, we are also motivated by the desire to maintain or achieve those pre-conditions which make self-actualisation possible. Maslow also believed that human beings were motivated by an innate desire to know, to understand and to give meaning to experience.

Maslow’s theory has been criticised for being too simplistic; after all, not everyone whose basic physiological and safety needs are fully met necessarily progress to the higher levels of motivation; and conversely many people are willing to put their ideals, their creative life or other people before their own need for personal safety and survival.

However, in his own work, Maslow himself made these very points and presented the hierarchy as a guide to general tendencies, rather than as a firm description of what motivates all individuals, under all circumstances. As a general guide to the range of needs that can motivate people, it can be very useful in adult learning.

**Maslow, A. H. (1943) “A Theory of Human Motivation, “***Psychological Review*, 50, 370-396.