

Understanding Personalities of Online Students: Importance for Successful Teaching

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Contents

1. Acquaintances
2. The rate of exchange of information
3. How can we make our online classes effective ?
4. Students make a psychological Model of Me
5. I am trying to understand my students
6. Sources of information
7. Emails from my students (1 – 7)
8. Creating Psychological Portrait of a student
9. What the Psychological portrait I need for?
10. Developing languages
11. Preparedness and Motivation
12. Preparedness and Zone of Proximal Development
13. Zone of Proximal Development 1
14. Zone of Proximal Development 2
15. Motivation and Pyramid of Needs
16. Hierarchy of Needs and Tree of Education
17. Developing language and Tree of Education
18. A New Pyramid of Needs
19. Conclusion
20. References

Acquaintances

- **Classes in person and classes online begin with acquaintances.** Students are trying to understand what kind of a person I am and what to expect from me, as their teacher.
- They know that their success in class depends significantly on my skills and on my character.
- In f2f classes students watch me – my facial expressions, my style of dress, how I talk, and what I say to them.
- I know this and I am trying to help students to understand me better by explaining my rules in class and by pointing their attention to the rules I set up in the syllabus.
- Sometimes they are trying to test me to see what my reaction can be in this or that case. *They are experimenting with me.*
- When teaching f2f classes, I have a personalized syllabus. By this syllabus students judge how well is my course organized and how well I am organized.

The rate of exchange of information

- In **f2f communication** we exchange incredible amounts of information through different channels (audio, visual) with incredible speed: hundreds of gigabits per second.
- In **online communication** the rate of exchange of information constitutes only megabits per second.
- This makes the processes of teaching and learning online more difficult and less effective.

How can we make our online classes more effective ?

- How to make online education less formal, more attractive, and more effective?
- With further development of information technologies and electronic methods of communications online education will become more effective than today, sometimes less frustrating, and more popular than traditional f2f education due to its greater flexibility.
- How can we make our online classes more effective, not waiting until high technologies will come and do this for us?
- This can be done by improving the *quality* of information we exchange with students.
- (English, 2009).

Students make a Psychological Model of Me (acquaintance continues)

- In online classes, students and teacher are trying to understand each other and create models of personalities, but the methods and tools available to both sides are limited and quite different from that of f2f classes.
- The visual and audio channels of exchange of information between students and teacher are minimized in online courses.
- Students can get information about me through my Contact Information in the Course Shell, my Profile and the Bio posted in the Introduction Discussion. They judge me by deciding how well my online course is organized.
- When students read my information they look for
 - a) My professional qualification
 - b) How well I am organized to teach their class
 - c) What kind of a person I am

I am trying to understand my student's personalities

- From my side I am trying to understand from online communication
- a) How well my students are prepared for the class,
- b) What are their motivations, and why did they decide to take my class?
- c) What is there family status?
- d) I also look at how good my students could be: smart, kind, hardworking, what hobbies they have.

Developing Language

- In the online **Introduction Discussion**, I ask students to tell why he/she is taking this class, what are his/her hobbies, etc. This gives me information about the student's **life goals** and, altogether with the other pieces of information mosaic, helps me to develop a **psychological portrait** (model) of a student.

This helps me to develop a “**language**” for effective communication with students.

Sources of information to make models

- I learn about my students while [reading their posts in discussions](#), and first of all [posts in the Introduction Discussion](#),
- reading their [profiles in the Classlist](#) (not all students post their profiles here),
- and through [emails](#) they send to me.
- The structure and linguistics of email carries very interesting information about the authors.
- **Below are examples of emails from some of my students.**
- All texts are reproduced exactly as they are. Let us read them and see if we can get any ideas about the personalities of the authors.

Emails from my students

Student 1.

Hi Professor,

*I just got your response to my lab, you mentioned that I did not cite my work, I had the best intentions to cite my work, my lab top was going to die and I did not have my charger with me. What can I do to improve my grad for this class, all in all? This is my last semester for my *CC, so I would be beyond disappointed if I let this class keep me back.*

*Thanks, ******

Emails from my students

Student 2

- *Good morning Professor Maslow,*

I must apologize for any perceived indignation of tone in my email prior correspondence. I was speaking from a place of frustration - of myself. I couldn't sleep last night in light of the incident and have come to you this morning in complete humility. If possible, any grace that you may be able to extend in the light of the situation would be greatly appreciated. Alas, I do understand that it is my responsibility to submit my assignments on time, and that the fault is all my own for working up until the last minutes of the deadline. I have a heavy load, 20 credit hours of all science and math courses; however, I have really committed to my academics and especially this course. Apart from missing the occasional deadline for a few of the discussions, I hope my work indicates that.

*Again, thank you for your consideration, ******

Emails from my students

Student 3.

Dr. Maslov, I completely understand; as an educator, I also have the same guidelines. More than anything, I just wanted you to be aware of the mistake so that you did not interpret my missing assignment as disrespect for you or your content. Thank you for your time and understanding.

Emails from my students

Student 4.

Is there anyway to get any points back even late points? I need this class to graduate and I need all of the points I can get to pass.

Emails from my students

Student 5.

*Please call me at ***-***-****. I'm having major issues with the online site. Im available any time.*

Emails from my students

Student 6.

I signed in to see what others have commented on my post about cloning, but its no longer there. I was the first one to post on the morning the discussion opened. I saw it there a few days after I posted it, and now I can't see it. Maybe you can help explain this?

Examples of emails

The Same student next day:

Disregard that last email. I was in the wrong discussion.

Creating Psychological Portrait

- *Can we get any ideas about personalities of authors of these emails ?*
- *Can we develop Psychological Portrait of a student ?*
- The mosaic of different data I am getting from emails and the other sources, helps me to develop a **psychological portrait** of a certain student .

What the Psychological portrait I need for?

- The Psychological portrait of a student helps me to understand how to communicate with him/her in the education process,
- It helps to develop a special language to communicate with a certain student.

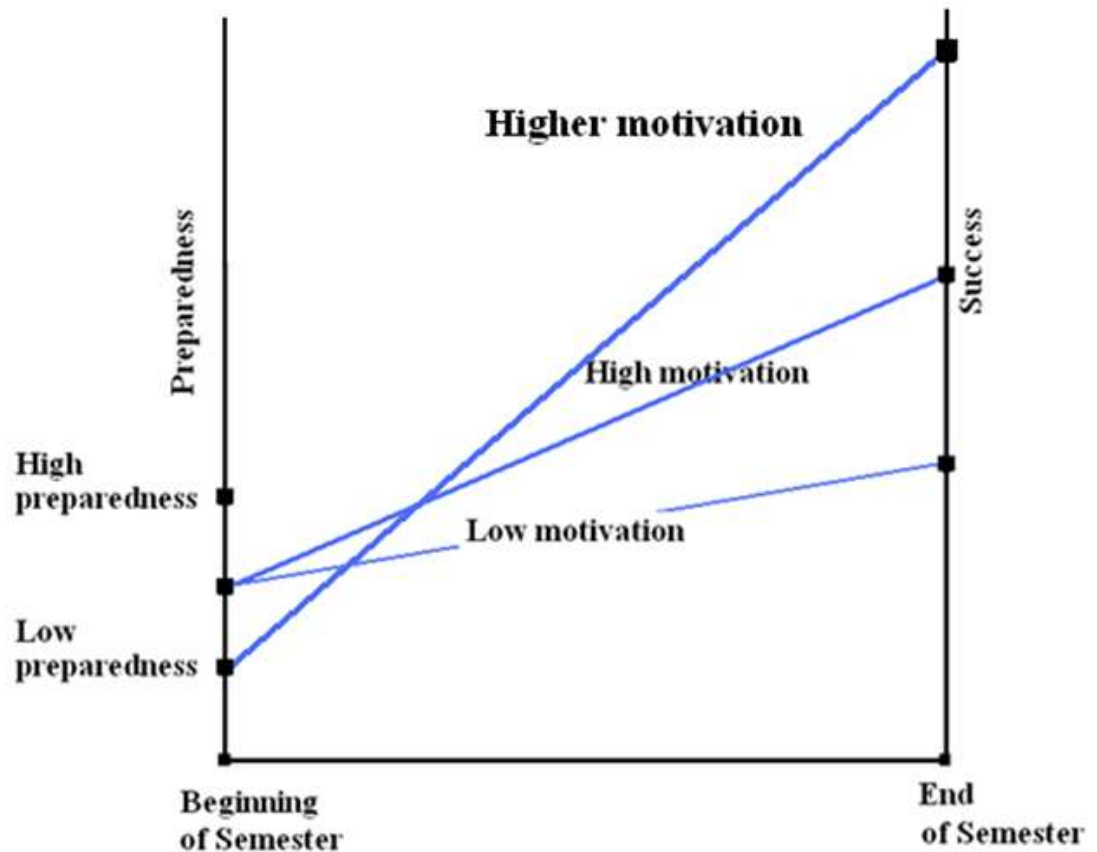
Developing Languages

- In thinking about what “**language**” I can use with this or that student, how can I teach him/her more effectively, I pay attention to student’s ***preparedness*** for the class, i.e. his/her educational background.
- The second priority I give to student’s ***motivation*** to take the class.

Preparedness and Motivation

the linear equation of students' success

- Preparedness is a starting point in the education process, and
- Motivation is the indicator how much efforts student can pay for gaining a success in class.



Preparedness and Zone of Proximal Development

- In a wider scope, **preparedness** is not a point on a vertical coordinate axis (y-intercept point)
- In some abstract space of knowledge it is a **region** with boundaries defining a **zone of proximal development** of a student.

Zone of Proximal Development 1

(Lev Vygotsky, 1986)

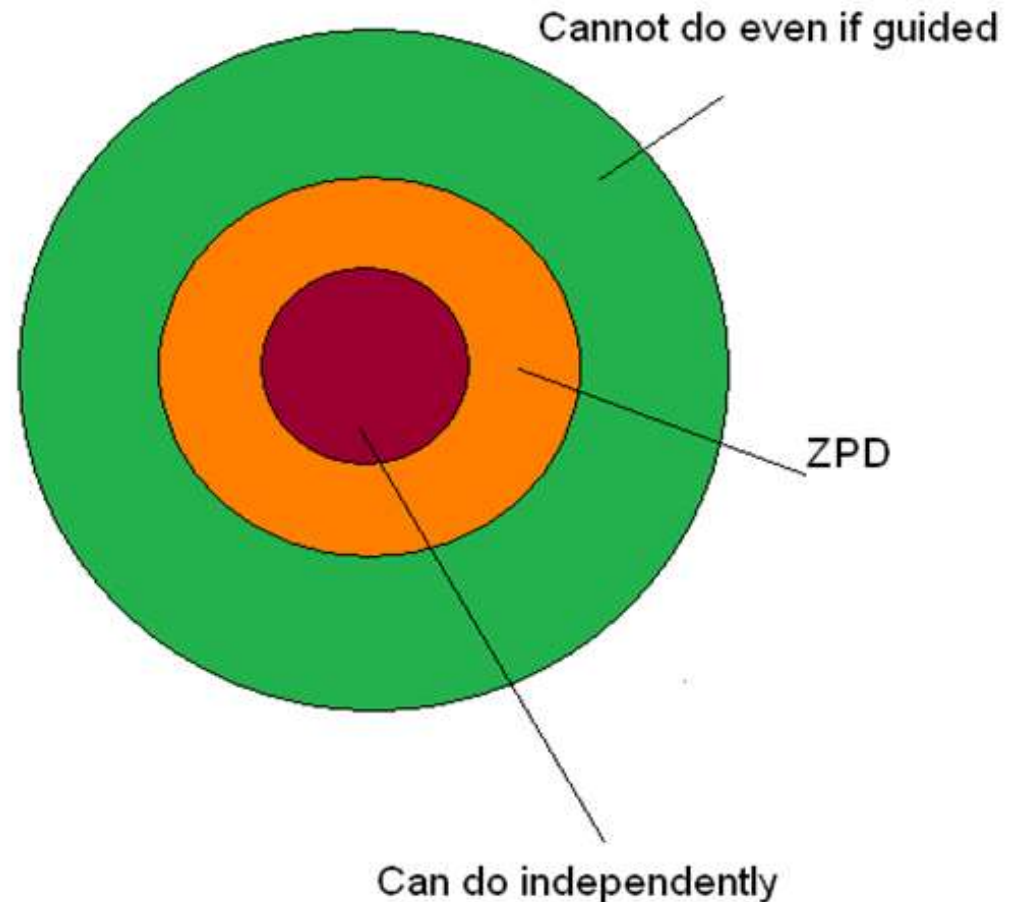
The concept of

Zone of Proximal
Development

was developed by

Lev Vygotsky

(Vygotsky, 1986).



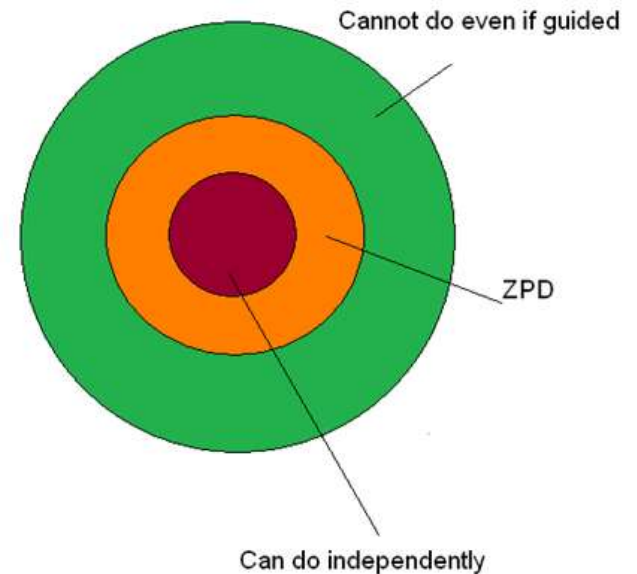
Zone of Proximal Development 2

ZPD is the area in which a student's success in gaining new knowledge depends on his/her preparedness, as well as the availability of instruction.

In my f2f classes, to determine my students ZPD, I give them a nongraded pretest at the very beginning of the semester.

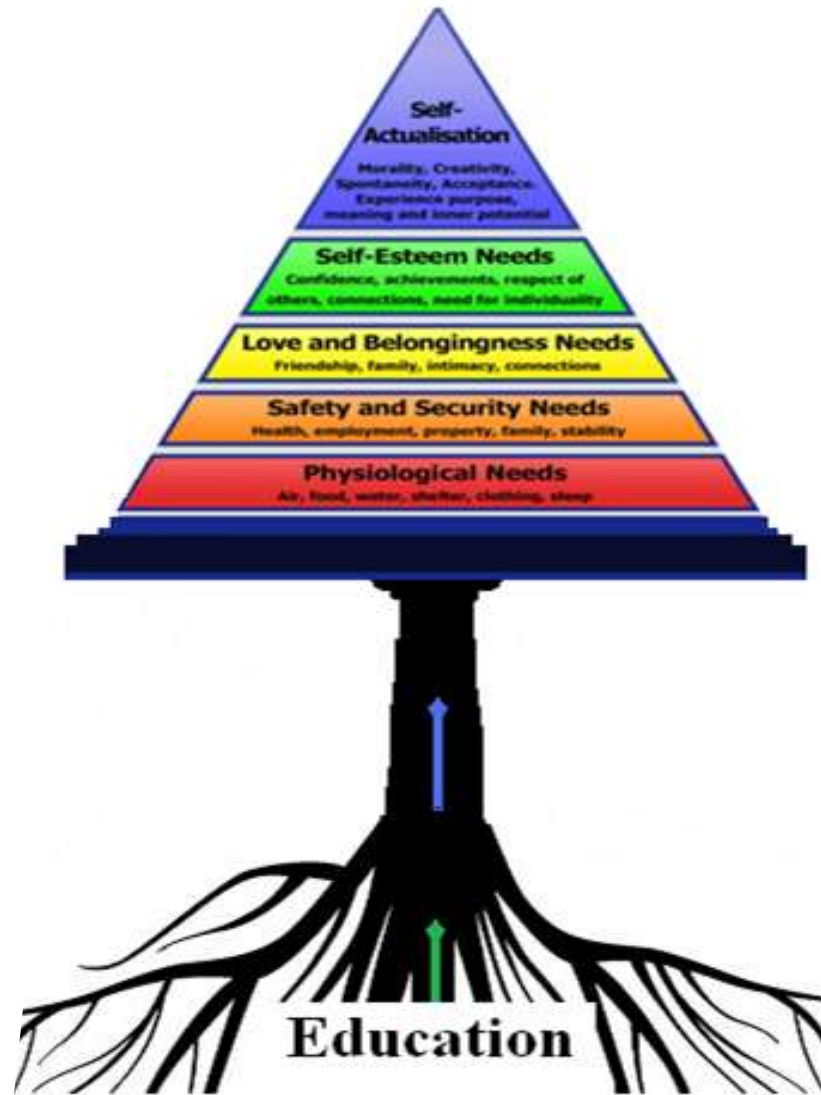
This helps me to see how well each student is prepared for the class and what “language” one can use for the most effective communication in the teaching process.

Teaching with “language” from Zone of Proximal Development of a student makes my work more effective and, for some students, less stressful.



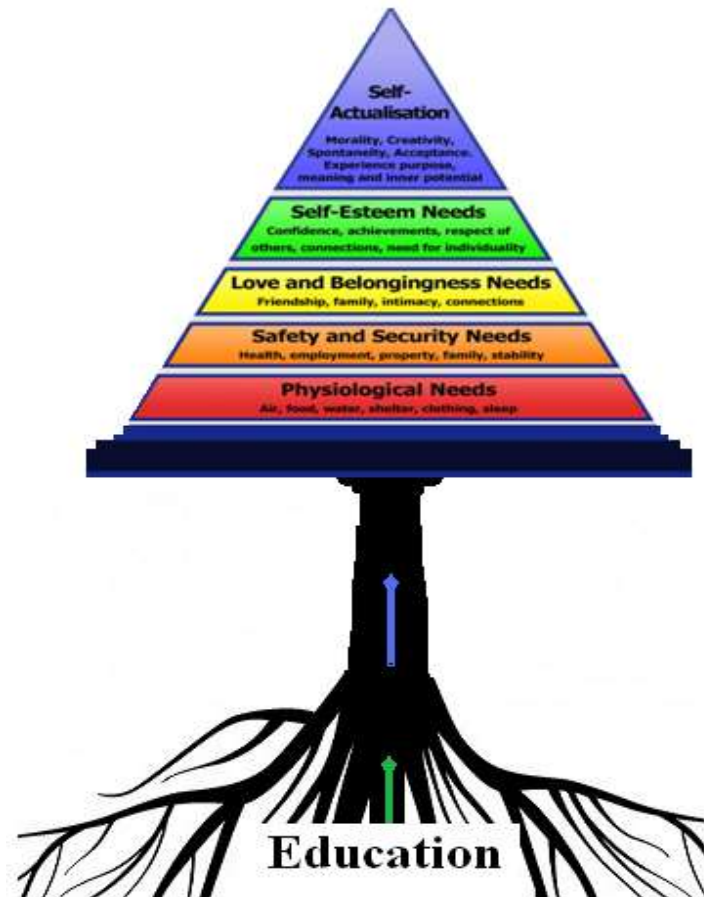
Motivation and Hierarchy of Needs of Abraham Maslow (Maslow, 1943, 1962).

- When we set our life goals, we assign them certain priorities.
- This set of goals with their priorities can be considered as a **personalized Pyramid of Needs.**

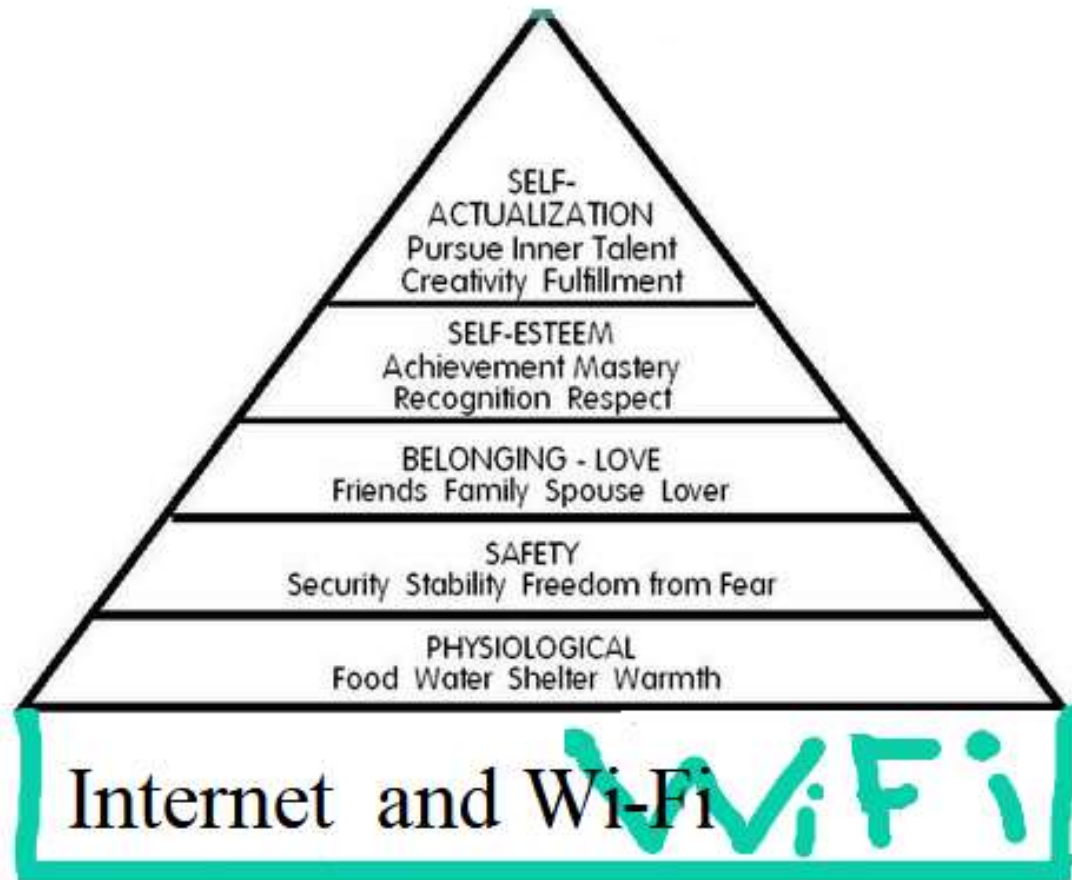


Developing Language and Tree of Education

Understanding life goals of a student, and their priorities in the **Pyramid of Needs** allows me to develop personalized language for teaching and communications with that student.



A New Pyramid of Needs



Conclusion

- The creation of a psychological model representing students personalities in online communication serves the following purposes:
- understanding *preparedness*, that is
- boundaries of *Zone of Proximal Development* of a student, and understanding,
- understanding student's *motivation* to take the class.
- This basis gives me the opportunity to develop a style, and a “language”, for better and more effective communication with a student in educational process.
- Part of this work was presented at *eLearning Conference*, 2014, in Breckenridge, Colorado (Maslov, 2014).

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Thank you!