Abraham and Albert: Linking psychology and teaching

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This paper looks at Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, as well as Albert Bandura's social learning theory. Initially, the discussion highlights the key points of these two Western theories, and details how they might benefit, or perhaps even inform the practice of, English language educators in Japan. The former theory forms the foundation for ten practical suggestions aimed at increasing intrinsic student motivation. The latter theory proffers the research-based conviction that modeling, imitation, and repetition, are vital to situations in which learning occurs. Of course, the research of Maslow and Bandura was never targeted to any one specific academic discipline, so their findings need not be limited solely to the world of foreign language teaching. The third, and final section, of this paper comprises a case study which strives to reveal the common ground shared by these two theories. This case study reveals how students can learn from acknowledged experts in a way that is respectful of their need for love, belongingness, and possibly even self-actualization.

　本論ではアブラハム・マズローの欲求階層論と、アルバート・バンデューラの社会的学習理論の英語教育への有効性について論ずる。まず、両者の理論の要点を概観した後、これらの西洋の理論が日本の英語教育にとっても有益であることを示してゆく。マズローの理論は、学生の生来的な動機を引き出すための10の方法の基礎となっている。一方バンデューラの理論については、学習の場においてモデリングや模倣、そして繰り返しが重要であることが実験結果を通じて明らかになっている。マズローやバンデューラの研究は特定の学問分野に限定されたものではないので、彼らの研究成果が言語教育の分野でのみ強調される必要はないはずである。最後に、二人の理論が共有する基盤を明らかにする事例研究を示してゆく。この事例によって、優秀な指導者の「所属と愛への欲求」と「自己実現」を重視する指導法を通じて、学生たちがどのように学習してゆくかという過程が明らかになる。

Like many other academic disciplines, the field of English language teaching (ELT) has certain researchers, conceptual approaches, or methodologies, that are widely believed to be the discipline's most mainstream, or in some cases, even hegemonic, at any given time. Steering away from the current mainstream of ELT scholarship, without in any way, shape, or form denigrating it, this paper strives to expose two theories that have not been widely examined in recent ELT literature. Both

theories hail from the field of educational psychology. The first one, Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, falls emphatically into the humanistic school of psychology. The second one, Albert Bandura's social learning theory, spans both behavioral and cognitive psychology.

The ensuing discussion will endeavor to glean as much "hands on," practical insight from these two theoretical frameworks as possible. Consequently, one of the principal questions to be asked in this paper will be: "How can these theories benefit, and possibly even improve the practice of, university teachers in Japan?"

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs

Abraham Maslow's primary contribution to educational psychology is widely considered to be his hierarchy of human needs. This theoretical framework assumes the shape of a pyramid. Human physiological needs comprise the base of this pyramid, and these needs include all that is necessary for survival. Once such physiological needs have been attained, or resolved, an individual can concentrate on the second level, which is the need for safety and security. The third level is the need for love and belonging, followed by the fourth level, the need for esteem. The fifth level, self-actualization, forms the apex of the pyramid. Self-actualization represents the highest human needs, or conflicts, and is unattainable for many people (Maslow, 1954).

Each level of the pyramid takes precedence over the level above it. In other words, one does not feel the lack of safety and security until one's physiological needs have been taken care of. In Maslow's own phraseology, a need does not become "salient" until the needs below it have been met (Maslow, 1954).

Now, in the more than five decades since the first edition publication of *Motivation and Personality* (1954), Maslow's paradigm has triggered an awareness of the importance of students' individual learning needs. For instance, if a financially-challenged university learner has only been eating instant noodles for the past three weeks, then this malnourished individual will probably be stuck at the bottom level of the hierarchy, that is, the physiological level.

Erika Rehmke-Ribary (2003) has opined that students who think that teachers are more flexible in lessons also exhibit enhanced intrinsic motivation. She also found that when a teacher has earned the respect of her/his students, enthusiasm is fostered. While offering students lessons that are flexible, and open to modifications, is comparatively easy, earning the respect of a class certainly isn't. However, few would argue that educators who have managed to earn their students' respect have considered these students' own learning needs. Accordingly, when teachers are considerate of their classes' needs, either directly or indirectly, Maslow's hierarchy comes into play.

More practically, ten suggestions that teachers can glean from Abraham Maslow's hierarchy can be paraphrased as follows:

1. Learning facilitators should help students to become authentic citizens, ones who are aware of their inner selves, and who can hear their "*inner-feeling voices*."

2. Learning facilitators should help students to transcend their cultural conditioning, and become world citizens.

3. Learning facilitators should help students discover their vocation in life, their calling, fate, or their destiny. This is usually focused on finding the right career, and the right life partner.

4. Learning facilitators should help students to learn that life is precious, that there is joy to be experienced in life, and if people are open to seeing the good and joyous in all kinds of situations, it makes life more worth living.

5. Learning facilitators must accept students as they are, and help students learn their "inner nature." From real knowledge of aptitudes and limitations we can know what to build upon, what potentials are really there.

6. Learning facilitators must see that the student's basic needs are satisfied. This includes safety, belongingness, and esteem needs.

7. Learning facilitators should "refreshen consciousness," teaching students to appreciate beauty, and the other good things in nature, and in living.

8. Learning facilitators should teach students that some controls are good, and complete abandon is bad. It takes self-control to improve the quality of life in all areas.

9. Learning facilitators should teach students to transcend their more minor problems, and grapple with the serious problems in life. These include the problems of injustice, of pain, suffering, and death.

10. Learning facilitators should help students to become good choosers. Students should have lots of practice in making good choices.

Although the first of these ten suggestions might appear overly nebulous, or too vague, for many busy educators to actually implement, to this writer's mind the implication here is that teachers need to be constantly aware of the fact that rather than teaching academic content, they teach human beings. The preceding sentence, of course, is not intended to denigrate academic content in any way, shape, or form.

In contrast to suggestion one, however, suggestion two can be viewed as being more easily implemented in the classroom. In other words, twenty-first century Japanese university graduates need to possess the intercultural awareness necessary to become a global citizen. Preparation for this is already taking place at several universities throughout Japan. Suggestion three advocates assisting students in finding their ideal career, as well as their ideal spouse. Clearly this is a tall order, indeed, and one that has not always been attainable within the framework of a fifteen, or thirty, week tertiary level curriculum. However, such heightened student-teacher rapport will no doubt facilitate the realization of this third point that Maslow's hierarchy has to offer educators.

Suggestion four posits that students should be given opportunities to appreciate the innate value of mortal existence. It also suggests that educators should try to maintain as positive a learning environment as possible. After all, positive stimuli are more pedagogically motivational than negative ones! To this end, then, if a university teacher in Japan ever has to counsel a student, or perhaps even discipline a student, Maslow would argue that this should be done privately, so as to maintain a positive, upbeat classroom tone.

Item five, above, advocates that teachers should help students uncover their unique talents and gifts, as well as their weaknesses, to help students attain their goals. It is hoped that educators would do this naturally- even in the absence of Maslow's hierarchy. Similarly, it is hoped that even teachers completely unfamiliar with Abraham Maslow would never the less strive to create the kind of classroom delineated in suggestion number six. An inclusive classroom characterized by safety, by a sense of belongingness, and one in which learners' self-esteem is fostered, would presumably be desired by most, if not all, university teachers.

Suggestion seven is closely related to number four, in that they both seek to engender a positive learning environment. However, Maslow's epithet "*refreshen consciousness*" may be difficult to translate into a practical suggestion for pedagogical improvement. These two words might well prove overly utopian for most twenty-first century tertiary classrooms. Of course, it would hardly be appropriate for Japanese university instructors to engage in transcendental meditation with their classes. At least, not within the current curricular guidelines!

In contrast to this, the above point eight advises that educational stakeholders need to be disciplined, and engage in some degree of self-control, if they aspire to have a decent quality of life. Given the rigors of the entrance examination process, this is not usually an issue for the students in many public universities. Few stakeholders in the educational system would dispute the fact that complete abandon is bad!

The second last of the above suggestions recommends that educators who would like to enhance student motivation should teach students to downplay minor problems, and instead focus on surmounting the "bigger picture" challenges of human life. Examples of the latter include injustice, oppression, pain, and death. As with the preceding one, this suggestion may not be relevant for the majority of public university students. This is because public universities have traditionally attracted, and only admitted, the caliber of student who has already mastered the art of overcoming life's more serious challenges, and tribulations.

The tenth, and final, lesson that teachers can take away from Maslow's hierarchy of human needs relates to decision making. As with the two preceding paragraphs, many of the learners enrolled at public tertiary institutions in Japan have already acquired the life skills necessary to gain them admittance into a competitive national university. Thus, many of the students enrolled at such campuses have already developed refined decision making skills. It is true, on the other hand, that unmotivated learners will sometimes become lethargic, and make questionable choices. In such cases, then, it is clearly important for educators to help students gain motivation, and to guide them onto the path of prudent decision making. The fourth question on the

informal questionnaire that will be discussed below deals specifically with in-class activities which foster good decision making.

This article's final discussion of Abraham Maslow will focus more on the tangible learning environment, and less on the non-tangible learning milieu. Classrooms wherein learners are encouraged to ascend the five levels of the hierarchy of human needs, with the ultimate goal of becoming self-actualized, are clearly ones where students feel safe. Not only physically safe, but also emotionally safe to make mistakes, and to take risks. However, in their *BMJ: British Medical Journal* article, Hutchinson, Cantillon, & Wood (2003) have determined that a classroom's physical state can directly impact student motivation. In "*Educational Environment*," these three researchers have posited that "…. room temperature, comfort of seating, background noise, and visual distractions are all factors of the environment that can affect concentration and motivation" (p. 810). Again, although this research was conducted outside of Japan, one can imagine that these four physical components of the learning location might have a similar impact here in Japan.

Albert Bandura's social learning theory

More recently, Albert Bandura has also thought about the educational implications of the human mind, specifically how humans learn. His social learning theory (1977) emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others (Bandura, 1977). Specifically, Bandura (1977) observed that:

Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action. (p. 22)

Thus, social learning theory explains human behavior in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences.

So, if Japanese university students learn their social behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions by observing, and then modeling, others, university learning facilitators need to remain vigilant in the classroom. This means that foreign language teachers need to constantly model the target language, and refrain from using the students' L1. It also means that students should, as much as possible, be discouraged from using their L1.

As just seen, Bandura's social learning theory (1977) falls into the realms of both cognitive and behavioral psychology. This is because Bandura acknowledges that the environment impacts upon human behavior- accordingly, students engage in many behaviors because of the reinforcing consequences (positive and negative) of doing so. But, reinforcement does not control us blindly. Its effects depend largely on *our awareness* of the relationship between our behavior, and its outcomes (Bandura, 1977). In other words, while university students are certainly effected by the particular learning environment they study in, they are not the salivating canines and stimuli seeking rodents made famous

in the classical, and operant, conditioning research of Ivan Pavlov, and Burrhus F. Skinner. That is, university students can fully imagine the consequences of their behavior, and govern themselves accordingly. They can also arrange their various study environments, so as *to control* some of the consequences of their actions. As Bandura has commented: "By arranging environmental inducements, generating cognitive supports, and producing consequences for their own actions, people are able to exercise some measure of control over their own behavior" (Bandura, 1977, page 147).

To paraphrase, learning environments (especially the reinforcing and punishing features of them) have a definite impact on students' behavior. However, students can partially control the effects of the environment by modifying their behavior, as well as by cognitive factors, such as the ability to anticipate the outcomes of their behavior. Thus, another label Bandura has ascribed to his theory is "reciprocal determinism." Both the student and her/his learning environment determines the degree to which learning will occur.

Bandura's theory can, in very broad terms, be reduced to three generalized affirmations. The first of these posits that much human learning is a function of observing the behavior of others, or of such "symbolic models" as fictional characters in the mass media. Secondly, humans usually learn to imitate by being reinforced for doing so, and continued reinforcement preserves, and lengthens, the imitative behavior. The third broad generalization that can be taken away from this theory holds that some aspects of imitation, or observational learning, can be explained by operant conditioning (i.e. B.F. Skinner, or Ivan Pavlov) (Bandura, 1977).

Copying the behavior of others is quite common in many societies. Bandura and Walters have cited the example of a young girl who was given child-sized replicas of the tools her mother used (Bandura & Walters, 1981). The young girl followed her mother, and imitated the parental actions with little, or no, direct pedagogy. Bandura and Walters concluded that most of the important social learning accomplished by the girl was a result of direct imitation (Bandura & Walters, 1981).

The word "model" can refer to an actual person whose behavior serves as a stimulus for an observer's response. It can also, as is often the case in many postmodern societies, refer to a symbolic model (Bandura, 1977). The latter refers to such things as oral or written instructions, pictures, mental images, not to mention real or fictional figures from the mass media. Few would argue, however, that much social learning involves direct observation of both real-life models and scenarios, such as the following case study.

Case study for a business English class: Harumi Miyako's promotion

The following case study has been adapted from *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* (Bolman & Deal, 1997, pp. 282-293). In this case study, students pretend that they are Harumi Miyako, headed to the office for her first day in a new job. As per this scenario, her company has transferred her to its lovely Ueda City office to become a department manager. Harumi has worked for the company since she left university. But, this is a big promotion, with a substantial increase in salary and responsibility. She knows that she faces a major challenge. She has inherited

a department with a reputation for slow, substandard customer service. Senior management attributes much of the problem to her predecessor, Saburo Kitajima. He is seen as authoritarian, and weak in customer orientation. Kitajima is being transferred to another job, but the company has asked him to stay on for a week to help Harumi get oriented. She knows that he hired most of her new staff, and that many of them might still feel loyal to him.

When Harumi arrives in Ueda city, she gets a frosty, chilly "*hello*" from Setsuko Hara, her new secretary. As she walks into her new office, which offers a gorgeous, panoramic view of the Chikuma River, Harumi sees Saburo Kitajima behind the desk, in a conversation with three other staff members. Harumi says "*hello*," and Kitajima responds by saying, "Didn't the secretary tell you that we're in a meeting right now? If you'll wait outside, I'll be able to see you in about an hour." Students are then asked to respond to Kitajima, assuming the role of Harumi Miyako.

After students have had enough time to prepare their own responses to Saburo Kitajima, they share them with the class. After this, students are provided with the four reframing responses that two internationally respected "models" (Bolman & Deal, 1997) have published. It must be noted that even an unusually intelligent class will usually acknowledge the superiority of the four reframing responses. These four responses may be seen in the attached Appendix 1. In this way, students can achieve a first-hand, visceral understanding of social learning theory. And, since this hypothetical scenario clearly involves issues of belongingness, and its opposite- social alienation, learners can vividly perceive the interface between the hierarchy of

needs and social learning theory. Seen in this light, then, this reframing role play allows learners to actively experience the praxis between theory and reality. Through it, students will have an opportunity to appreciate that, even though Maslow and Bandura's theories originated in the West, they also have a degree of applicability in Japan. In thinking about, and grappling with, this reframing role play, students might well comprehend that there are aspects of human learning that transcend ascribed, cultural characteristics. Regardless of one's culture, there is a certain amount of common ground with respect to students' motivation to learn, and the manner in which learning occurs.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion has endeavored to examine, and briefly introduce, Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and Albert Bandura's social learning theory. In so doing, it has attempted to illustrate how both theories can benefit, and hopefully inform the practice of, language educators in Japan. More specifically, ten suggestions for educators were extricated from Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Although a couple of these were perhaps overly nebulous or vague, most of them were seen to offer up tangible, practical suggestions for the ELT classrooms of Japan. Included among these ten suggestions were exhortations for learning facilitators to keep the learning milieu as positive as possible; to create a "safe" learning environment in which learners feel comfortable taking intellectual risks; to assist learners in developing intercultural awareness; and to constantly be mindful of learners' self-esteem requirements. All of these were seen to have a positive correlation to students' intrinsic

motivation. Additionally, fostering students' life skills (such as self-control, personal discipline, and far-sighted decision making) were also included in these ten suggestions.

With respect to social learning theory, this paper revealed its three key tenets: (a) that much human learning depends upon observing the behavior of others; (b) that humans learn to imitate by being reinforced for doing so and (c) that some aspects of imitation and observational learning can be explained in terms of operant conditioning principles. The classroom implications here concern the fact that teachers must provide as much positive reinforcement, and as many positive stimuli, as possible. This, of course, ties in with Maslow's suggestion to keep the learning milieu as positive as possible. The above discussion of social learning theory also urged Japanese foreign language educators to maximize their in-class use of the target language- the more the merrier, with complete L2 immersion as the most desirable scenario.

Finally, the reframing case study could be used to provide learners with a hands-on, realistic opportunity to directly engage with social learning theory. And, since this case study was created by Western writers, students could also grapple with the possibility of ethnocentrism, and the degree of cultural specificity, in the four proposed solutions. Of course, the case study could also serve as a springboard for allowing students to actively encounter the common ground between the two above theoretical constructs.

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Appendix 1

Bolman and Deal's Reframing of the Harumi Miyako Case Study

Frame One: The Structural Frame

Kitajima: Didn't the secretary tell you that we're in a meeting right now? If you'll wait outside, I'll be able to see you in about an hour.

Miyako: She didn't mention it, and I don't want to interrupt important work, but we also need to set some priorities and work out an agenda for the day, anyway. Saburo, have you developed a plan for how you and I can get to work on the transition?

Kitajima: I thought we'd meet later on, after I get through some pressing business.

Miyako: The pressing business is just the kind of thing I need to learn about as the new manager here. What issues are you discussing?

Kitajima: How to keep the office functioning when the new manager is not ready for the job.

Miyako: Well, I have a lot to learn about this office, but I feel I'm ready. With your help, I think we can have a smooth and productive transition. How about if you continue your meeting, and I just sit in as an observer? Then, Saburo, you and I could meet to work out a plan for how we'll handle the transition. After that, I'd like to schedule a meeting with each manager to get an individual progress report. I'd like to hear from each of you about your major customer service objectives, and how you would assess your progress against objectives. Now, what were you talking about before I got here?

Frame Two: The Human Resource ("HR") Frame

Kitajima: Didn't the secretary tell you that we're in a meeting right now? If you'll wait outside, I'll be able to see you in about an hour.

Miyako: I'm sorry if I'm interrupting, but I'm eager to get started, and I'll need all your help. (She walks around, introduces herself, and shakes hands with each member of her staff. Saburo Kitajima scowls silently.) Saburo, could we take a few minutes to talk about how we can work together on the transition, now that I'm coming in to manage the department?

Kitajima: You're not the manager yet. I was asked to stay on for a week to get you started- though, frankly, I doubt that you're ready for this job.

Miyako: I understand your concern, Saburo, because I know how committed you are to the success of the department. If I were you, I might be worried about whether I was turning my baby over to someone who wouldn't be able to take care of it. But, I wouldn't be here if I didn't feel ready. I want to benefit as much as I can from your experience. Is it urgent to get on with what you were talking about, or could we take some time first to talk about how we can start working together?

Kitajima: We have some things we need to finish.

Miyako: Well, as manager, I always prefer to trust the judgement of the people who are closest to the action. I'll just sit in as an observer while you finish up, and then we can talk about how we move forward from here.

Frame Three: The Political Frame

Kitajima: Didn't the secretary tell you that we're in a meeting right now? If you'll wait outside, I'll be able to see you in about an hour.

Miyako: (pleasantly) Saburo, how about we skip the games and go to work. I want this department to be a winner, and I hope that's what all of us want. I also would like to manage the transition in a way that's good for your career, Saburo, and for the careers of everyone in the room.

Kitajima: If I need help from you on my career, I'll ask.

Miyako: OK, but the vice president has asked me to let him know about the cooperation I get here. I'd like to be able to say that everyone has been helping me as much as possible. I hope that's what you'd like, too.

Kitajima: I've known the vice president a lot longer than you have. I can talk to him myself.

Miyako: I know, Saburo, he's told me that. In fact, I saw him a few minutes ago. What do you say about you and I walking over and seeing him right now?

Kitajima: Uh …. No, not right now.

Miyako: Well, then, let's get on with it. Do you want to finish what you were discussing, or is this a good time for us to develop some agreement on how we're going to work together?

Frame Four: The Symbolic Frame

Kitajima: Didn't the secretary tell you that we're in a meeting right now? If you'll wait outside, I'll be able to see you in about an hour.

Miyako: (smiling) Maybe this is just the traditional initiation ritual in this department, Saburo, but let me ask a question. If one of your customers came through the door right now, would you ask her to wait outside for an hour?

Kitajima: If she came barging in like you did, sure.

Miyako: Are you working on something that's more important than responding to our customers?

Kitajima: They're not your customers. You've only been here for five minutes.

Miyako: True, but I've been with this company long enough to know the importance of putting customers first.

Kitajima: Look, you don't know the first thing about how this department functions. Before you go off on some customer crusade, you ought to learn a little about how we do things.

Miyako: There's a lot I can learn from all of you, and I'm eager to get started. For example, I'm very interested in your ideas on how we can make this a department where as soon as a person walks in, he or she gets the sense that this is a place where people care, where they're responsive, where they're helpful. I'd like that to be true for anyone who comes in- a staff member, a customer, or just someone who got lost and came into the wrong office by mistake. That's not the message I got from my initiation a couple of minutes ago, but I'm sure we can think of lots of ways to change that. How does that fit with your image of what the department should be like?