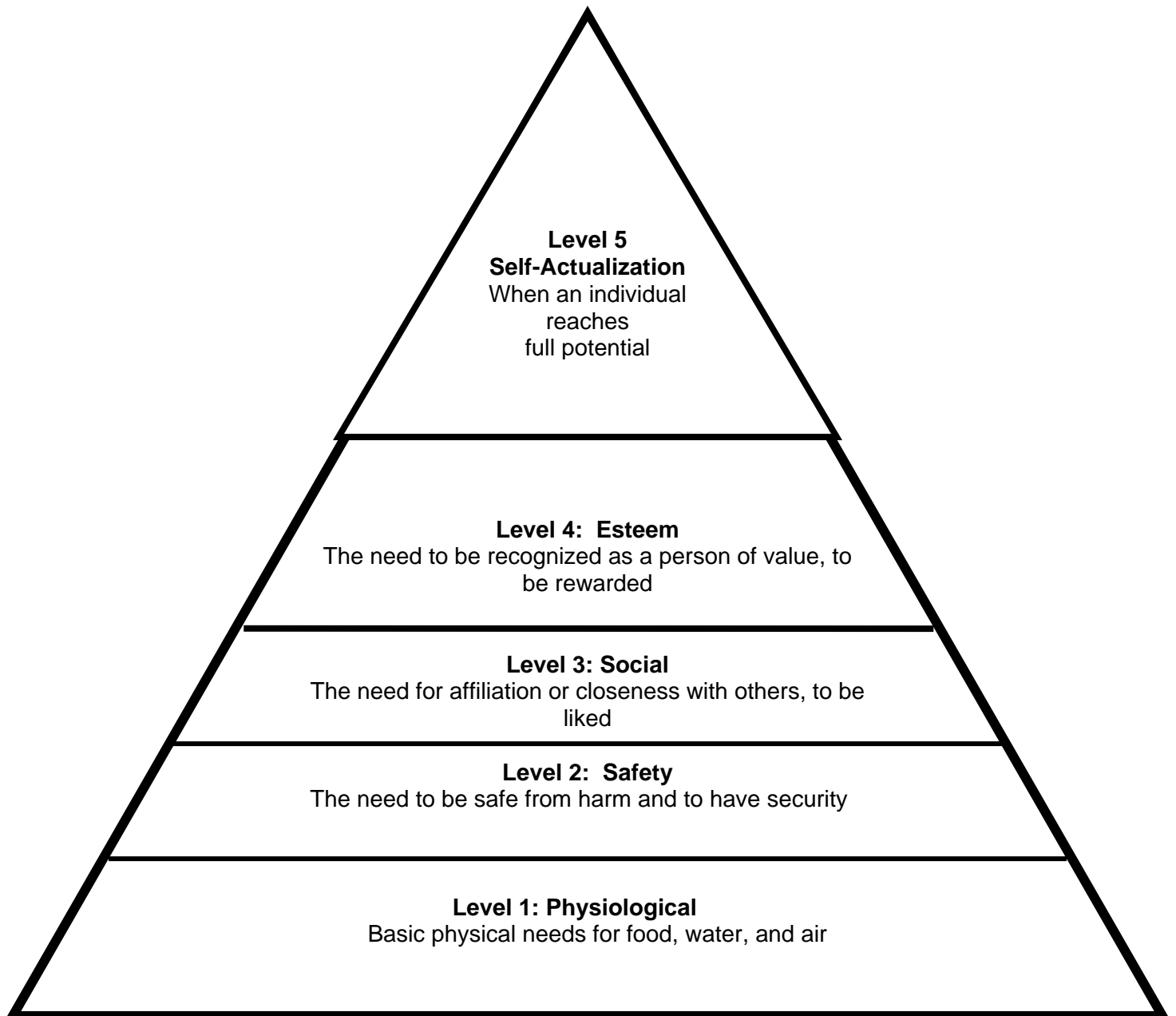


## Why People Participate in Education

A basic skill in teaching adults and youth is developing an understanding of their motivation or reason for participation in learning. Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" has become a classic model of human behavior and is widely used in a variety of contexts. Maslow's theory states that people are motivated to satisfy specific needs. These needs range from the very basic and physical to very complex and psychological. Maslow's hierarchy consists of five levels:



Maslow noted two observations in his study of human behavior. The first is that humans are basically “wanting creatures,” so as soon as they have satisfied one level of need, they move on to the next. Likewise, if a basic need is not met, all other needs become unimportant and we regress on the hierarchy until it is met. His second observation was that a need that has been met is no longer a motivator.

Extension programs relate to all levels of Maslow’s hierarchy. A few examples for each of the levels include:

- **Physiological:** knowledge and survival tips for disaster victims (flood, tornado), water quality
- **Safety:** farm safety programs, proper disposal of household hazardous materials
- **Social:** participation in programs and activities such as 4-H clubs
- **Esteem:** the many and diverse opportunities to volunteer time and talents to Extension programs.

Maslow’s theory provides a general guide to human behavior and participation. Houlde (1961) describes motivations of three types of adult learners:

<b>Goal Oriented:</b>	Individuals who use education as a means of accomplishing well-defined objective (specific problem to be solved)
<b>Activity Oriented:</b>	Individuals who take part because they want to be involved in the activity or process and not necessarily because they have a strong interest in the subject of content (for fun and/or to fulfill social needs)
<b>Learning Oriented:</b>	Individuals who seek knowledge for its own sake (strong interest but not necessarily a need)

Understanding motivations for participation can assist the Extension educator in planning and implementing programs that closely reflect the interests and needs of participants. In addition, understanding barriers to participation is helpful for planning strategies to overcome them.

Barriers to participation in adult education programs can be categorized as situational, institutional, or informational. Most barriers fall into the **situational** category—those factors that relate to a particular time in relation to the social and physical environment. Examples include busy schedules, lack of child care or

transportation or money. **Institutional** barriers are those that originate from the institution itself, for example, inconvenient scheduling or restrictive locations. **Informational** barriers may be due to lack of information about the organization or program. Many people in the United States are not only unfamiliar with the Cooperative Extension Service; they are totally unaware of its existence or programming.

## Planning for Success

The teaching-learning interaction is a complex process with several factors that need to be considered for a successful effort.

- **Know the audience.** Extension audiences, in particular, are very diverse. The successful educator will attempt to learn as much about the audience as possible. The more information available, the greater the chance of creating a learning experience that is meaningful and appropriate. For example, when working with a limited-resource audience, recommendations and procedures can be adapted to fit within budget restrictions.
- **Plan, Plan, Plan.** Be prepared. The effective teacher never approaches the learning situation unprepared. He or she establishes instructional objectives based on an identified need and chooses teaching strategies that are appropriate for the level of the audience, the nature of the subject, and the resources (time, expertise, money, and facilities) available.
- **Establish a Positive Environment for Learning.** The learning environment consists of both physical and psychological factors. Optimum learning occurs when all conditions are considered.
  1. Physical factors include:
    - good lighting and visibility
    - comfortable seating
    - room arrangement suitable for learning activities
    - good acoustics
    - accessible to the disabled
    - comfortable temperature—not too hot or cold
  2. Psychological factors involve establishing an environment that is comfortable, based on mutual respect and trust, and encourages interaction. This can be accomplished by:
    - becoming acquainted with students, greeting them, and if possible learning their names
    - involving students in their own learning
    - providing reinforcement and encouragement, avoiding put-downs
    - recognizing differences and respecting the uniqueness of each student
    - being accessible

## Summary

Teaching and learning is an interactive process that occurs in many different settings and situations. Factors such as teacher effectiveness, barriers to learning, physical environment, motivation of the learner, and subject content are a few of the circumstances that can enhance or diminish the learning situation. The Cooperative Extension Service is the world's largest adult education nonformal program. One of the primary functions of Extension is the diffusion and adoption of innovations. The diffusion process is a unique communication method for sharing knowledge about new ideas. The successful Extension educator carefully considers the many influences on the teaching-learning environment when planning and conducting Extension programs.

Excerpts from: Seevers, B. Graham, D., Gammon, J. & Conklin, N. (1997). *Education Through Cooperative Extension*. Albany, NY: Delmar Publishers.