

# Promoting Discipline & Learning

by Dr. Marvin Marshall

## *Habit vs. Awareness for the 3 Practices and for the Hierarchy of Social Development*

This article first appeared in the March 2009 issue of teachers.net/Gazette at <http://teachers.net/gazette/MAR09/marshall/>

**Once something becomes a habit, awareness of it decreases.**

I received the following question:

I am on the 2nd year of implementation of the Hierarchy of Social Development. I am an elementary character/p.e. teacher. This is also the first year of "total school" implementation of *Discipline Without Stress* and it is going well. I had a thought on adding another level to the hierarchy: Level "E" for excellence--Level E being the daily consistent habit of being on level D. Your thoughts when you can. Thanks.

My response:

There have been many suggestions for what the levels should be called. However, they all detract from the power of using the letters A, B, C, and D because of the meanings behind the vocabulary.

In the *Hierarchy of Social Development*, Level A and Level B are unacceptable. Level C and Level D are both acceptable. The two lower levels describe BEHAVIORS. The two higher levels describe MOTIVATION. (For the most effective use of the *Hierarchy Of Social Development*, refer to the opening paragraph and the 8th point at *Significant Points*

[http://www.marvinmarshall.com/pdf/hierarchy\\_significant\\_points.pdf](http://www.marvinmarshall.com/pdf/hierarchy_significant_points.pdf).)

The hierarchy becomes significantly more effective when the *focus* is on the *difference between the motivational levels of C and D*. The more you have students reflect on their *motivational level*, the more effectively the system serves both you and them.

When first starting to use the hierarchy, there is a tendency to refer to the level at which the person is "acting" or "behaving." Since Levels C and D refer to *MOTIVATION*, rather than behavior, the action may appear to be identical on both levels even though the motivation may be different. For example, some students in a classroom will be applying themselves to receive a good grade (Level C).

Others will be applying themselves because they know that putting forth effort in their learning is in their own best interests and is the right thing to do (Level D).

Since OBEDIENCE (LEVEL C) DOES NOT CREATE DESIRE, it is only motivation at Level D that brings the most personal satisfaction, as the following incident sent to me indicates.

Last night I purchased some items at the grocery store. When I took the bags out of my cart and prepared to leave the store for my car, I noticed I had a small key lime clutched in my hand that I had forgotten to put on the conveyor belt; so I hadn't paid for it. At ten for \$1, it would have cost ten cents. My first thought was, I don't want to walk all the way back to a cashier for ten cents. The store won't miss that meager amount. Nevertheless, I pulled a dime from my wallet and walked back to the nearest cashier and handed it to her, explaining the reason. She replied by saying, "God bless you for your honesty."

Well, I have to admit; I did feel better than I would have if I had simply walked to my car without paying the ten cents.

As we live, we experience various levels. If you have experienced great anger, chances are that you had little concern for the effect your behavior had on others (Level A). If you ever drove faster than the speed limit, you made your own rules of the road (Level B). If you were courteous and considerate of others, your motivation could have been to do what others were doing (Level C), or your motivation could have been to be courteous and considerate of others because that was the right thing to do (Level D).

NO ONE OPERATES ON LEVEL D ALL THE TIME. A major point about thinking about the hierarchy is to be continually aware of the level one chooses. It is like sitting up straight. You choose it, and then in a few minutes you realize that you are slouching again. Pull in your stomach for girth control (a conscious activity), and in a few minutes you realize that you are no longer "pulling it in." ONCE AN ACTIVITY BECOMES HABITUAL, YOU LOSE AWARENESS. Hence, although the idea sounds like a good one, a "Level E" would lose the significant step of ALWAYS BEING AWARE OF ONE'S CHOICES--a key to empowerment that so many young people need.

Great question! Thanks for asking.

By the way, the same "awareness" is necessary for the THREE PRACTICES: positivity, choice, and reflection. Are you aware when your self-talk and your communications to others are negative? Are you giving options to reduce

coercion? Are you asking reflective questions such as, "What can I learn from this experience?"

Copyright © 2009 Marvin Marshall.

Additional information is available at [www.MarvinMarshall.com](http://www.MarvinMarshall.com)