
UNIT 2 HAVIGHURST'S DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS FOR ADULTHOOD, MIDDLE AGE AND OLD AGE

Structure

2.0 Introduction

2.1 Objectives

2.2 What is a Developmental Task?

2.2.1 Characteristics of Developmental Task

2.3 Stages of Development

2.4 Sources of Developmental Tasks

2.5 Developmental Tasks

2.5.1 Adulthood Developmental Tasks (19 – 30 years)

2.5.2 Middle-age Developmental Tasks (30 – 60 years)

2.5.3 Old Age or Later Maturity Developmental Tasks (60 Years and Over)

2.6 Overview of Developmental Tasks

2.7 Let Us Sum Up

2.8 Unit End Questions

2.9 Suggested Readings

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Robert James Havighurst was a professor, physicist, educator, and aging expert. Havighurst worked and published well into his 80s. According to his family, Havighurst died of Alzheimer's disease at the age of ninety. He proposed that all individuals progress through a series of developmental stages, each comprising a series of developmental tasks. Although these tasks can be learned at home or in other settings, Havighurst maintained that the interrelated nature of developmental tasks suggests that educators should consider all developmental tasks of children and adolescents.

2.1 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, will be able to:

- define the developmental task;
- discuss characteristics of developmental tasks;
- explain the sources of developmental tasks; and
- describe the different developmental tasks during adulthood and old age.

2.2 WHAT IS A DEVELOPMENTAL TASK?

The term “developmental task” was introduced by Robert Havinghurst in the

1950's. A developmental task is one that arises predictably and consistently at or about a certain period in the life of the individual (Havighurst, 1948 and 1953). He believed that learning is basic to life and that people continue to learn through out life. According to him a developmental task is a task which an individual has to and wants to solve in a particular life-period. He writes, "A developmental-task is the midway between an individual need and a social demand. It assumes an active learner interacting with an active social environment". Thus, it is also an early and significant contributor to the emerging field of lifelong human development.

Successful achievement of these tasks leads to the person's happiness, and increases the probability of competence in the following tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by society and difficulty in later tasks. The concept of developmental tasks assumes that human development in modern societies is characterised by a long series of tasks. Some of these tasks are located in childhood and adolescence, whereas others arise during adulthood and old age.

2.2.1 Characteristics of Developmental Task

Havighurst considered the many different aspects of a person's life that influence a person's development viz., the **biological development** and physical structures of the individual; the **society** in which the person lives, and the resultant cultural influences, as well as the individual's **personal characteristics**, values and goals.

This view of development takes into account the role of physical maturation and the role that society plays in determining the skills that need to be learned at a certain age. According to Havighurst, there are **sensitive periods** which he called **teachable moments**, when an individual is mature enough to learn the developmental tasks. These tasks may be physical like walking, cognitive like learning to read, or social where the person develops significant relationships. Once the critical period of development is over, learning may still occur. Language skills for example, continue to develop as one learns more complex ways of using language.

Some tasks are the same for everyone, regardless of where you live, as they are about human biology. Example: learning to crawl and walk is pretty much same in all societies, as it relies on genetic factors. Some tasks are different in different societies. For example, some tasks may be in different forms in different cultures or it may exist in culture and not in the other culture. To cite an example the task of getting a occupation is different in different cultures, in some cultures an individual gets his job while the person is very young, while in other culture, the person may get a job after long education and training.

Havighurst added that biology and society have a lot influence, but personal values of the people who prepare them have as much influences on identifying the task. He described his developmental tasks on middle class Americans, however he did try to define a few points from lower-socio economic class and upper class as well.

Self Assessment Questions

1) What do you understand by teachable moments?

.....
.....

.....
.....

2) Developmental tasks are and that arise at a certain period of life.

.....
.....
.....
.....

3) What are the personal characteristics needed for developmental tasks?

.....
.....
.....
.....

2.3 STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

Havighurst identified the following six major stages in human life:

- Infancy & early childhood (Birth till 6)
- Middle childhood (6-12)
- Adolescence (13-18)
- Early Adulthood (19-30)
- Middle Age (30-60)
- Later maturity (60 and over)

There are typical developmental tasks for each of these periods. The developmental tasks concept has a long and rich tradition. Its acceptance has been partly due to recognition of sensitive periods in our lives and partly due to the practical nature of Havighurst's tasks. Knowing that a youngster of a certain age is encountering one of the tasks of that period (learning an appropriate sex role) helps adults to understand a child's behaviour and establish an environment that helps the child to master the tasks. Another good example is that of acquiring personal independence, an important task for the middle childhood period. Youngsters test authority during this phase and, if teachers and parents realise that this is normal and, even a necessary phase of development, they react differently than when they see it as a personal challenge (Hetherington and Parke, 1986).

For example, note Havighurst's developmental tasks for middle adulthood, one of which is a parent's need to help children become happy and responsible adults. Adults occasionally find it hard to "let go" of their children. They want to keep their children with them far beyond any reasonable time for their own good, as well as that of their children. Once they do, they can enter a happy time in their own lives if husbands and wives are not only spouses but friends and partners as well.

2.4 SOURCES OF DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

Developmental tasks arise from three different sources (Havighurst, 1948, 1953). In his bio psychosocial model, the first important issue is biology, second is psychology and the last one is the sociology. He identifies three sources of developmental tasks (Havighurst, 1972)

- First, some tasks are mainly based on physical maturation example, learning to walk, talk, and behave acceptably with the opposite sex during adolescence; adjusting to menopause during middle age.
- Another source of developmental tasks involves personal values and aspirations. These personal factors result from the interaction between ontogenetic and environmental factors, and play an active role in the emergence of specific developmental tasks (example, choosing a certain occupational pathway).
- The third source of developmental tasks relates to socio-structural and cultural forces. Such influences are based on, for instance, laws (example, minimum age for marriage) and culturally shared expectations of development.

These tasks may be physical like walking, cognitive like learning to read, or social where the person develops significant relationships. Once the critical period of development is over, learning may still occur. Language skills for example, continue to develop as one learns more complex ways of using language.

2.5 DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

Robert Havighurst(1952, 1972, 1982) has identified critical developmental tasks that occur throughout the life span.

2.5.1 Adulthood Developmental Tasks (19 – 30 years)

In young adulthood, developmental tasks are mainly located in family, work, and social life. Family-related developmental tasks are described as finding a mate, learning to live with a marriage partner, having and rearing children, and managing the family and one's home. A developmental task that takes an enormous amount of time of young adults relates to the achievement of an occupational career. Family and work related tasks may represent a potential conflict, given that the individual's time and energy are limited resources. Thus, young adults may postpone one task in order to secure the achievement of another. With respect to their social life, young adults are also confronted with establishing new friendships outside of the marriage and assuming responsibility in the larger community.

- 1) *Selecting a mate:* Until it is accomplished, the task of finding a marriage partner is at once the most interesting and the most disturbing of the tasks of early adulthood.
- 2) *Learning to live with a marriage partner:* After the wedding there comes a period of learning how to fit two lives together. In the main this consists of learning to express and control one's feeling that is anger, joy, disgust, so that one can live intimately and happily with one's spouse.
- 3) *Starting a family:* To have the first child successfully.
- 4) *Rearing children:* With the gaining of children the young couple take over a responsibility far greater than any responsibility they have ever had before. Now they are responsible for human life that is not their own. To meet this responsibility they must learn to meet the physical and emotional needs of

young children. This means learning how to manage the child, and also learning to adapt their own daily and weekly schedules to the needs of growing children.

- 5) *Managing a home:* Family life is built around a physical center, the home, and depends for its success greatly upon how well-managed this home is. Good home management is only partly a matter of keeping the house clean, the furniture and plumbing and lighting fixtures in repair, having meals well-cooked, and the like.
- 6) *Getting started in an occupation:* This task takes an enormous amount of the young person's time and energy during young adulthood. Often he becomes so engrossed in this particular task that he neglects others. He may put off finding a spouse altogether too long for own happiness.
- 7) *Taking on civic responsibility:* To assume responsibility for the welfare of a group outside of the family such as a neighbourhood or community group or church or a political organisation.
- 8) *Finding a congenial social group:* Marriage often involves breaking of social ties for one or both young people, and the forming of new friendships. Either the man or the woman is apt to move away from former friends. In any case, whether old friendships are interrupted by distance or not, the young couple faces something of a new task in forming a leisure time pattern and finding others to share it with. The young man loses interest in some of his former bachelor activities, and his wife drops out of some of her purely feminine associations.

2.5.2 Middle-age Developmental Tasks (30 – 60 years)

Certain problems of adjustment are characteristic of middle age in today's world. Some of them are more difficult for both men and women and others are more difficult for women. The major problems that men and women must meet and adjust to satisfaction during middle age involve the developmental tasks for this period. The developmental tasks of the middle years arise from changes within the organism, from environmental pressure, and above all from demands or obligations laid upon the individual by his own values and aspirations. Since most middle-aged people are members of families, with teen-age children, it is useful to look at the tasks of husband, wife, and children as these people live and grow in relation to one another. Each family member has several functions and roles.

Developmental tasks during midlife relate to, for example, achieving adult responsibilities, maintaining a standard of living, assisting children with the transition into adulthood, and adjusting to the physiological changes of middle age (example, menopause) and related aspects. Also, this is the time children group up and proceed to do their courses out of town and thus leave their homes. The parents have to adjust to their leaving. During the middle years the biological changes of ageing become prominent. Especially for the woman, the latter years of middle age are full of profound physiologically based psychological change.

- 1) Achieving adult civic and social responsibility
- 2) Establishing and maintaining an economic standard of living
- 3) Assisting teen-age children to become responsible and happy adults
- 4) Developing adult leisure, time activities
- 5) Relating oneself to one's spouse as a person
- 6) Accepting and adjusting to the physiological changes of middle age

7) Adjusting to ageing parents.

Havighurst has divided these tasks into four major categories:

- 1) *Tasks relating to physical changes:* These include the acceptance of, and adjustment to physical changes that normally occur during middle age.
- 2) *Tasks relating to changed interests:* The middle aged person often assumes civic and social responsibilities and develops an interest in adult oriented leisure time activities which were not taken care of during early adulthood.
- 3) *Tasks relating to vocational adjustments:* These tasks revolve around establishing and maintaining a relatively stable standard of living.
- 4) *Tasks relating to family life:* The major tasks include relating to oneself to one's spouse as a person, adjusting to aging parents, and assisting teen age children to become responsible and successful adults.

Like the developmental tasks of other periods, those of middle age are not mastered at the same time or in the same way by all the people. Some are more likely to be mastered during the early years of middle age, and some in the latter part of the period. It varies for different individuals.

The age at middle aged people get married, the time when they become parents, and the number of children they have all influence the age at which they must adjust to the developmental tasks relating to family life, to civic and social responsibilities and to leisure time activities. Those who married when they still were in their teens may have no children at home when they reach the middle age. Consequently they can take a more active part in social and civic life. Their leisure time activities can be adult rather than family oriented. They are free to spend more time together than they were able to do when their children were living at home.

During midlife, people reach the peak of their control over the environment around them and their personal development. In addition, social responsibilities are maximized. Midlife is also a period during which people confront the onset of physiological changes (Lachman, 2001).

Unless the person performs well as a provider, it will be difficult for the family to perform well. For instances unless the woman performs well as a mother, it will be difficult for the teen-age child to meet the tasks of adolescence. The developmental tasks of family members then, are reciprocal and they react upon one another.

Most of the middle age tasks prepare the individual for successful adjustment to old age and hence the mastery of these tasks is important for success and happiness not only in middle age but also in their later years.

2.5.3 Old Age or Later Maturity Developmental Tasks (60 Years and Over)

The period of old age begins at the age of sixty. At this age most individuals retire from their jobs formally. They begin to develop some concern and occasional anxiety over their physical and psychological health. In our society, the elderly are typically perceived as not so active, deteriorating intellectually, becoming narrow-minded and attaching new significance to religion and so on. Many of the old people lose their spouses and because of which they may suffer from emotional insecurity.

'Nobody has ever died of old age', is a true statement. Since old age is close

to the end point of life, death has been associated with old age. Death is actually caused by disease, pollution, stress, and other factors acting on the body. In the biological sense, some organs and systems of the body may start deteriorating. In the psychological sense, there may be measurable changes in the cognitive and perceptual abilities. There are also changes in the way a person feels about him/herself. You must have come across old people who are very active in life and socially very participative. Such persons seem to be productive, stable and happy.

Mental or physical decline does not necessarily have to occur. Persons can remain vigorous, active, and dignified until their eighties or even nineties. In fact, the older persons have vast reservoir of knowledge, experience, and wisdom on which the community can draw. In view of increase in life expectancy increasingly greater proportion of society is joining the group of aged people. Hence they need greater participation in national planning and make them feel as an integral part of society.

Old age has often been characterised as a period of loss and decline. However, development in any period of life consists of both gains and losses, although the gain-loss ratio becomes increasingly negative with advancing age (Heckhausen, Dixon, and Baltes, 1989; Baltes, 1987). The fact that man learns his way through life is made radically clear by consideration of the learning tasks of older people. They still have new experiences ahead of them, and new situations to meet. At age sixty-five when a man often retires from his occupation, his changes are better than even of living another ten years. During this time the man or his wife very likely will experience several of the following (i) decreased income, (ii) moving to a smaller house, (iii) loss of spouse by death, (iv) a crippling illness or accident, (v) a turn in the business cycle with a (vi) consequent change of the cost of living. After any of these events the situation may be so changed that the old person has to learn new ways of living.

The developmental tasks of later maturity differ in only one fundamental respect from those of other ages. They involve more of a defensive strategy that is of holding on the life rather than of seizing more of it. In the physical, mental and economic spheres the limitations become especially evident. The older person must work hard to hold onto what he already has. In the social sphere there is a fair chance of offsetting the narrowing of certain social contacts and interests by the broadening of others. In the spiritual sphere there is perhaps no necessary shrinking of the boundaries, and perhaps there is even a widening of them. Havighurst forward the following developmental tasks for this view.

- 1) *Adjusting to decreasing physical strength and health:* Physical strength begins to decline from age 30 to age 80 and above. Most weakening occurs in the back and leg muscles, less in the arm muscles. There is a progressive decline in energy production. Bones become increasingly brittle and tend to break easily. Calcium deposits and disease of the joints increase with age. Muscle tissue decreases in size and strength. Muscle tone becomes increasingly difficult to maintain with age because of an increase in fatty substance within the muscle fibres. This is often caused by the relative inactive role thrust on the elderly in our society. Exercise can help maintain power and sometimes even restore strength to the unused muscles. Changes in the general posture become more evident in old age. It has been found that the organ systems of most persons show a 0.8 to 1 percent decline per year in functional ability after the age of 30. Some of this decline is normal, some is disease related and some are caused by factors such as stress, occupational status, nutritional status and various environmental factors.

- 2) *Adjusting to retirement and reduced income:* Retirement requires adjustment to a new life-style characterised by decreased income, lesser activity level, and increased free time. Retirement causes extreme stress in males because in our society a significant part of men's identity depends on their jobs. Loss of job thus results in loss of self esteem and self worth. Retired people find it difficult to adjust to retirement because of financial problems, illness, and feelings of loneliness, and suddenly finding that time hangs and they do not know how to spend their time. Retired individuals have to make several adjustments in their roles, personal and social associations, and in their sense of accomplishment and productivity.

However, it does not necessarily mean that retirement results in negative consequences for every person. Individual's personal attitude toward retirement varies as a function of a number of factors such as income, educational level, and occupational level. In case of some, it may not have any adverse effects on their self-esteem and life satisfaction. Health may even improve for some after retirement. Retired individuals may find more time for social and hobby-related activities especially if they have adequate economic resources and are healthy to engage in these activities.

- 3) *Adjusting to death of spouse:* Elderly persons are not afraid of death. They do, however, fear to a great extent the dying process — the process of dying in pain or dying alone. Their feelings related to death may be due to specific occurrences in their lives such as being moved from home to nursing home, failing health, or the loss of one's spouse. Thus fear about death must be understood in the light of current life circumstances, the individual's own value system, and what death personally means to a person. Some older adults have to adjust to the death of their spouses. This task arises more frequently for women than for men. After they have lived with a spouse for many decades, widowhood may force older people to adjust to loneliness, moving to a smaller place, and learning about business matters etc.
- 4) *Establishing an explicit affiliation with one's age group:* Social convoy is a cluster of family members and friends who provide safety and support. Some bonds become closer with age, others more distant, a few are gained, and some drift away. Elders do try to maintain social networks of family and friends to preserve security and life continuity.
- 5) *Meeting social and civic obligations:* Other potential gains in old age relate to the task of meeting social and civic obligations. For example, older people might accumulate knowledge about life (Baltes and Staudings, 2000) and thus may contribute to the development of younger people and the society.
- 6) *Establishing satisfactory physical living arrangements:* The principal values that older people look for in housing are: (i) quiet, (ii) privacy, (iii) independence of action, (iv) nearness to relatives and friends, (v) residence among own cultural group, (vi) cheapness, (vii) closeness to transportation lines and communal institutions —libraries, shops, movies, churches, etc.

Self Assessment Questions

- 1) What are the effects of retirement on a person of old age period?

.....
.....

.....

2) Which are middle age developmental tasks relating to family life?

.....

.....

.....

3) Which developmental task, you think, is the most difficult during early adulthood and why?

.....

.....

.....

4) List socio-cultural sources which are important for the developmental tasks.

.....

.....

.....

2.6 OVERVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

Early Adulthood (19-30)	Middle Adulthood(30-60)	Later Maturity (60 and above)
1) Selecting a mate	1) Helping teenage children to become happy and responsible adults	1) Adjusting to decreasing strength and health
2) Learning to live with a partner		
3) Starting a family	2) Achieving adult social and civic responsibility	2) Adjusting to retirement and reduced income
4) Rearing children		
5) Managing a home	3) Satisfactory career achievement	3) Adjusting to death of spouse
6) Starting an occupation	4) Developing adult leisure time activities	4) Establishing relations with one's own age group
7) Assuming civic responsibility	5) Relating to one's spouse as a person	5) Meeting social and civic obligations
	6) Accepting the physiological changes of middle age	6) Establishing satisfactory living quarters
	7) Adjusting to aging parent	

2.7 LET US SUM UP

Havighurst's developmental tasks explain about how the problems are faced by us in all stages of life and he explains them really well. We can all relate that biology has some kind of effects in our development, as well as psychology and society.

One thing Havighurst seems to miss is that his solutions to these problems, it is not so clear in this theory how we sort out these problems. When it comes to if his theory is scientific, it is hard to say, some part of his theory can be tested, and equally some parts are very difficult to test.

Havighurst's theory is easy to understand, and it is clear and there is no ambiguity. It is not applicable to many cultures, as he concentrated only on middle class Americans. In reference to his developmental tasks, Merriam and Caffarella (1991) state that "Although the timeframe and some of the tasks suggested by him are somewhat presently applicable, the idea of specific life tasks giving rise to a teachable moment is not". It is disappointing that not many theorists are influenced by his theory.

2.8 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Discuss briefly stages of developmental tasks.
- 2) What are the sources of developmental tasks?
- 3) Explain adulthood developmental tasks.
- 4) Discuss developmental tasks of maturity period.
- 5) Give an overview of developmental tasks.

2.9 SUGGESTED READINGS

Havighurst, R. J. (1952). *Developmental tasks and education*. New York: David McKay.

Baltes (2003). *Theoretical Propositions of Life-Span Developmental Psychology*. John Wiley & Sons.

Elizabeth B. Hurlock (1980). *Developmental Psychology: A Life-Span Approach*. Publisher: Tata McGraw-Hill.

Berk L. (2009). *Development Through the Lifespan*. Publisher: Allyn & Bacon

Rajpal K. (2006). *Developmental Psychology: New Trends and Innovations*. Publishers: Deep and Deep.