

# Robert Havighurst: Developmental Theorist



**Developmental Task Theory (Robert Havighurst: *teachable moments*)**

***Infancy - Early Childhood* (birth to 5 years)**

***Middle Childhood* (6 to 12 years )**

***Adolescence* (13 to 18 years)**

***Early adulthood* (19 to 29 years)**

***Middle Adulthood* (30-60 years)**

***Later Maturity* (60>)**

The idea of "developmental task" is generally credited to the work of Robert Havighurst who indicates that the concept was developed through the work in the 1930s and 40s of Frank, Zachary, Prescott, and Tyron. Others elaborated and were influenced by the work of Erik Erikson in the theory of psychosocial development. Havighurst states:

"The developmental-task concept occupies middle ground between two opposed theories of education: the theory of freedom—*that the child will develop best if left as free as possible*, and the theory of constraint—*that the child must learn to become a worthy, responsible adult through restraints imposed by his society*. A developmental task is midway between an individual need and societal demand. It assumes an active learner interacting with an active social environment" (1971, p. vi). [http://nongae.gsnu.ac.kr/~bkkim/won/won\\_117.html](http://nongae.gsnu.ac.kr/~bkkim/won/won_117.html)

### **The Developmental Task Concept**

From examining the changes in your own life span you can see that critical tasks arise at certain times in our lives. Mastery of these tasks is satisfying and encourages us to go on to new challenges. Difficulty with them slows progress toward future accomplishments and goals. As a mechanism for understanding the changes that occur during the life span.

Robert Havighurst(1952, 1972, 1982) has identified critical developmental tasks that occur throughout the life span. Although our interpretations of these tasks naturally change over the years and with new research findings. Havighurst's developmental tasks offer lasting testimony to the belief that we continue to develop throughout our lives.

Havighurst (1972) *defines a developmental task as one that arises at a certain period in our lives, the successful achievement of which leads to happiness and success with later tasks; while leads to unhappiness, social disapproval, and difficulty with later tasks*. Havighurst uses lightly different age groupings, but the basic divisions are quite similar to those used in this book. He identifies three sources of developmental tasks (Havighurst, 1972)

- **Tasks that arise from physical maturation.** For example, learning to walk, talk, and behave acceptably with the opposite sex during adolescence; adjusting to menopause during middle age
- **Tasks that from personal sources.** For example, those that emerge from the maturing personality and take the form of personal values and aspirations, such as learning the necessary skills for job success.
- **Tasks that have their source in the pressures of society.** For example, learning to read or learning the role of a responsible citizen.

According to our biopsychosocial model, the first source corresponds to the "bio" part of the model, the second to the "psycho," and the third to the "social" aspect. Havighurst has identified six major age periods:

- infancy and early childhood (0-5 years),
- middle childhood (6-12 years)
- adolescence (13-18 years),
- early adulthood (19-29 years),
- middle adulthood (30-60 years), and
- later maturity (61+).

Table presents 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 a 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 behavior 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 realize that this is a normal, even necessary phase of development, they react differently than if 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.

Havighurst is not alone in the importance he places on the developmental task concept (Cole, 1986; Goetting, 1986; Cristante & Lucca, 1987; Cangemi and Kowalski, 1987). For example, Goetting (1986) has examined the developmental tasks of siblings and identified those that last a lifetime, such as companionship and emotional support. Other tasks seem to be related to a

particular stage in the life cycle, such as caretaking during childhood and later the care of elderly parents.

Identifying and mastering developmental tasks help us to understand the way change affects our lives. Another way to understand life span changes is to identify those needs that must be satisfied if personal goals are to be achieved. To help you recognize the role that needs play in our lives, let's examine the work of Abraham Maslow and his needs hierarchy.

### **Developmental Tasks of Infancy and Early Childhood:**

1. Learning to walk.
2. Learning to take solid foods
3. Learning to talk
4. Learning to control the elimination of body wastes
5. Learning sex differences and sexual modesty
6. Forming concepts and learning language to describe social and physical reality.
7. Getting ready to read

Ages birth to 6-12

1. Learning physical skills necessary for ordinary games.
2. Building wholesome attitudes toward oneself as a growing organism
3. Learning to get along with age-mates
4. Learning an appropriate masculine or feminine social role
5. Developing fundamental skills in reading, writing, and calculating
6. Developing concepts necessary for everyday living.
7. Developing conscience, morality, and a scale of values
8. Achieving personal independence
9. Developing attitudes toward social groups and institutions

Developmental Tasks of Adolescence:

### **Ages birth to 12-18**

1. Achieving new and more mature relations with age-mates of both sexes
2. Achieving a masculine or feminine social role
3. Accepting one's physique and using the body effectively
4. Achieving emotional independence of parents and other adults
5. Preparing for marriage and family life Preparing for an economic career
6. Acquiring a set of values and an ethical system as a guide to behavior; developing an ideology
7. Desiring and achieving socially responsible behavior

### **Developmental Tasks of Early Adulthood**

1. Selecting a mate
2. Achieving a masculine or feminine social role
3. Learning to live with a marriage partner
4. Starting a family
5. Rearing children
6. Managing a home
7. Getting started in an occupation
8. Taking on civic responsibility
9. Finding a congenial social group

### **Super's Vocational Development Stages**

1. **Growth B-14 Development of Abilities, Interests, Needs Associated with Self-Concept**
2. **Exploration 15-24 Tentative Plans, Choices Narrowed not Finalized**
3. **Establishment 25-44 Stable Career Identity**
4. **Maintenance 45-64 Small Adjustments**
5. **Decline 65 + Reduced Productivity and Retirement**

### **Super's Adolescent Attitudes and Competencies (Vocational Maturity)**

1. **Oriented to Vocational Choice? Knows choices need to be made and emotionally engaged.**

- 2. Information and Planning? Has information and engages in long term planning including educational plans.**
- 3. Consistent Vocational Preferences? Has stable vocational goals and plans.**
- 4. Vocationally Independent? Makes decisions independently**
- 5. Wise Decisions? Decisions fit aptitude, ability, resources**