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### **The developmental-tasks conception and its significance for education and social work**

The term developmental-task was introduced by Robert Havighurst in the 1950's. According to R. Harvighurst the term developmental-tasks means tasks which come up in a social context during the course of time of a human being. Meanwhile the developmental-tasks concept has become an important theoretical approach in educational science and in theories of evolution - but not in social work and social pedagogy. In the following article I would like to show that this approach is very important to theory and practice of social pedagogy and social work.

Before introducing the model I will demonstrate a daily situation: Imagine we are on an overcrowded high speed train from Frankfurt to Berlin. There is a mother sitting at a table with two children. One of the children, a boy, is about 5 years old, the girl is at an age where she goes to primary school. It seems that they have been travelling for some time now since there are fully scribbled colouring books and the remains of a meal on the table. Apparently, the boy seems to be bored. After a while he starts getting impatient and asks his mother who seems to be exhausted from the travelling: "When are we there?" and further "I want an ice-cream". The mother signals that it will still take some time to arrive, that he would have to be patient and that once they'd arrive he would get his ice cream. After about five minutes, the boy starts getting impatient again on his seat, sits up straight and says: "When are we there? I want an ice-cream". "Soon we will be there. Then you will get your ice-cream" says his mom. The boy stays quiet for several minutes but then starts again. The mother is stressed out but keeps calm and sticks to her soothing gestures. The voice of the boy starts getting more powerful. Finally, the older sister who was busy all the time with the colouring books intervenes and says energetically: "You have to wait until we arrive" and the mother supports the girl by adding: "Christine also wants to have an ice-cream. We all have to wait. And you are big boy as well. You will have to wait as Christine does." At last the boy stays calm and all fellow passengers are relieved.

The situation described here could be interpreted in different ways: for instance as a specific behaviour of families in public. Furthermore, one could also interpret the mother-child-

interaction regarding typical interaction patterns. The scene could also be analysed with regards to reactions of stress or dealing with oral wishes of children. But how to interpret the scene in a pedagogical way, in a pedagogical context in which the aim is to transmit and learn? What does the mother transmit to her child, what does the child learn?

Generally speaking the scene is all about coping with a developmental-task, namely postponing a desire until a later point in time. In this case the oral desire for an ice cream (it could also have been a Fanta). We call this task: Acquiring deferred gratification patterns. Against the background of this the interaction between mother and child makes sense. The adaptation and transmitting of patterns is in first instance a pedagogical problem mainly in family education. It is part of the basic tasks of family education that children learn to embed their physical desires such as eating, sleeping, drinking, playing and romping around in a time structure.

The out-coming of the just described scene gives reason for the optimistic prognosis that the boy will cope with this developmental-task. But we could also assume a situation in which the family and the boy cannot cope with this task since he has no older sister who is a role model to him and that the mother due to her daily worries and stress does not have the necessary tolerance of frustration in order to face the boy's demands. She would, in order to avoid stress, provide the boy with sweets in advance. It may also be possible that within the family exists a chaotic time structure in which the demands of each person are, if possible, satisfied ad hoc. We would then or at the latest when the boy starts with school, have a social-pedagogical problem. The mother would then maybe ask for some help at an Education Advisory Centre or welfare centre.

My thesis is as follows: It is a principal task of social pedagogy and social work to support children, young people and parents in order to cope with developmental-tasks which are too much for them to deal with and which have put them in social problems. Furthermore to support them by introducing them to the developmental-tasks. The practical work of the pedagogues aims at helping such parents and children by giving educational advice or offering special support programs such as daily groups, social team work, specially-trained staff for the care of children or education in a children's home.

Mentioning this, I am in the middle of the subject. As a first step I would like to clarify the term "developmental-tasks". Against this background, I would like to explain in a second step what I do understand by saying "a social-pedagogical problem". In a third step, I would like to demonstrate the educational-scientific and social-pedagogical research perspectives and introduce you to a diagnostical approach which I have developed myself.

### **1. What does *developmental-task* mean?**

According to R. Havighurst a *developmental-task* is a task which an individual has and want to solve in a special life-period. Havighurst says: "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". In the educational-scientific way the developmental-tasks concept is fruitful in many ways: The idea of the concept is that children and young people want to solve problems themselves (active learner). The German Pedagogy speaks in this context of the "*Bildsamkeit*" of the individual. In the concept physical and psychical inner maturation processes and socially influenced development and education are being taken into consideration.

The developmental-tasks concept assumes that social and educational arrangements impede or support the corresponding tasks. There are different types of tasks: One distinguishes individual or group specific developmental-tasks from general, cross-cultural developmental-tasks. Learning how to use these patterns to postpone basic needs (deferred gratification patterns) could be an example for a general developmental-task . Besides that there exist developmental-tasks which can only be solved under certain social circumstances. This is the moment when we talk about specific standards of every day behaviour. A successful socialisation depends on whether one can successfully cope with the general developmental-tasks. Summarising all this we can talk of general developmental-tasks when three factors come together:

1. The effort of the older generation to pass on certain social requirements, certain cultural abilities to the younger generation. In order to stick to the example we just had: The mother wants the child to learn to postpone his wishes to a later point of time. She knows that this is a difficult process which requires a lot of patience and tries to face all the consequences of the process.

2. The effort of the up-growing to adopt the expectations of the older generation, to consider them as subjectively important and to acquire the competencies related to this. For the young boy on the train the task becomes subjectively meaningful because he also wants to be grown-up and mature like his older sister. He knows that the grown-ups are patient and knows how to wait and he makes every effort to wait until the train arrives although time is abstract to him.
3. A third factor which plays an important role is the existence of a "sensitive phase or period" during which, due to the physical and psychological level of development, the requirements are given in order to fulfil the developmental expectations. One cannot expect of a two-year old child to be able to postpone physical demands one would rather give him a dummy.

The developmental-tasks concept has gradually been accepted in pedagogy since the empirical study of Robert Havighurst. Again, I would like to emphasise that this is an pedagogical concept. The concept refers to embedding educational cultures, in German "Lernmilieus" (pedagogical environments). Developmental-tasks are always connected to pedagogical surroundings or expressed differently: Coping with the tasks always takes place in a pedagogical surrounding. In this context Donald Winnicott speaks of a "supporting environment", Robert Kegan of "culture of embeddedness", Uri Bronfenbrenner of "ecological system". In pedagogy we talk about the pedagogical environments meaning the all-day-gestures of a way of life in which the up-growing individual is being integrated. By using the term pedagogical environment we mean for instance, the family, the school, the youth centre, the kindergarten, etc. Pedagogical environments fulfil two functions: They support and acknowledge the already existing abilities of children. At the same time children are confronted with gaining new abilities, new learning tasks. Good pedagogical environments offer a variety of possibilities to young people to demonstrate their already gained abilities and to gain social recognition; simultaneously young people are faced with new tasks.

Sticking to the above mentioned subject: Learning how to adapt and use desire patterns is integrated in the pedagogical surrounding of the family. The young boy who has to learn to postpone his wish for an ice-cream until a later point of time will do this with the help of his mother and his older sister, via verbal and physical gestures.

Here the theoretical approaches which go hand in hand with the developmental-tasks concept can be seen clearly. This is the interaction theory introduced to educational studies by Klaus Mollenhauer and Hans Thiersch at the beginning of the 70's but also the development theory of Robert Selman and Robert Kegan. Also the theorem of the life-world such as described by Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann plays an important role in the developmental-tasks concept.

So far I have talked about the developmental-tasks as a pedagogical problem but when does the developmental-task become a social-pedagogical problem?

## **2. The Social-Pedagogical Problem**

We talk about a social-pedagogical problem when children and young people but also parents in the role of mediators cannot cope with general developmental-tasks and thus get into social difficulties. There could be various reasons for this:

First of all, it might be the child or the young person itself who has a problem. The up-growing, for instance, cannot cope with the tasks set due to his physical or psychical constitution and needs support by a pedagogical setting. This is the case with mental or physical handicapped.

The fact that young people are not able to deal with certain developmental-tasks is not necessarily caused by themselves. It can also be caused by the pedagogical environments they have been growing up in. Social difficulties occur when a pedagogical surrounding, for instance the family, does not sufficiently support the abilities of the individual, transmit activities which are socially unaccepted or exceed to much of a child. It is then when we have to face a social-structural problem and when the youth welfare has to act and help. There are three possible social situations when pedagogical environment cannot cope with developmental-tasks and when we talk about a social-pedagogical problem which seems to occur in large scale:

1. Families which cannot cope with up-coming social modernisation processes. Due to their way of live or due to adaptation difficulties they become a social outsider. In this context

we talk about problems which occur related to modernisation processes and the upcoming of fringe groups and social marginalisation.

2. Also long-lasting poverty can burden a family to such an extent that certain education tasks cannot be fulfilled.
3. Not only difficulties to adapt oneself to social changes can cause a social-pedagogical problem but also migration: Very often generation conflicts appear within families who migrated. The older generation sticks to traditional values and rules while the younger generation has adopted itself to a way of life which stays in contradiction to the parents expectations.

The establishment of social-pedagogical institutions was born on the reflection of such problems. History shows number of examples of social-pedagogical problems. In 1799 they were mentioned for the first time by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi in his Stanser letter. Against the background of the social radical changes of the French Revolution which have taken place all over Europe but also of the rural poverty Pestalozzi developed his educational ideas and the idea to found an institution. The introduction of the educational welfare in the 19. century was a response to the introduction of the compulsory school attendance and the difficulty to teach the rural population how to read and write. These examples are proof of social modernisation processes which ask for higher requirements in education and which led to the foundation of special social-pedagogical organisations. Also mass poverty in cities by the end of the nineteenth century and child neglecting related to this were the reason for the establishment of social-pedagogical facilities such as the kindergarten, crèche and youth associations. Discussions hold in former times show this clearly.

It is my thesis that social-pedagogical organizations have been supporting families to solve developmental-tasks and this not only since the introduction of the children's and youth welfare act at the beginning of the 19th century. They have been supporting them much longer. This requires that social workers know the developmental-tasks children and young people cannot cope with.

### **3. Social-pedagogical research and diagnosis**

How to do research on developmental-tasks and how to diagnose them? Assuming that educational development of children is set off by themselves (in the sense of active learners),

then children and young people must have a rough imagination of these development facts. As a consequence developmental-tasks and also the difficulties which occur related to this would have to be expressed by the up-growing through self-interpretation. In a word, the people affected, in this case children and young people, are the ones who can best give information and not the experts.

A significant approach to developmental-tasks with which children and young people have to deal with is the narrative interview. At a certain age, this is when they start talking about themselves one can ask them about their daily experiences and do research on the development and educational processes which they themselves mention. The methodical research is called hermeneutics. The hermetic paradigm is relatively old: It was founded 200 years ago by Friedrich Schleiermacher. With regard to verbal self-representation there are two ideas of analysis, two research directions:

1. I can analyse the interviews regarding typical developmental-tasks. In this case the attention of the investigator is not drawn to the specific characteristics of the single case but to the general features which are expressed verbally. The question would be: "Which are the typical tasks children and young people of a certain age cope with?" This is the moment when we talk about basic research aiming at the typification of educational and development facts. According to my point of view the work of social-pedagogical research amongst other things consists of describing the developmental-tasks children and young people cannot cope with and with regard to this find appropriate pedagogical surroundings.
2. Using the interview as a basis I could also analyse the specific characteristics of each individual. A second analysis approach would be to bring out more clearly the educational development and life themes of a child or a young person but also to find out the individual obstacles which occur. The question would be: Which are the developmental-tasks he or she cannot cope with and what are the solutions? This approach is called case diagnosis. In my opinion a second task of social pedagogy would be to develop methods which allow us to recognise developmental-tasks with which the individual cannot cope with and offer guidelines for help. This is the so called case diagnosis.

Finally I would like to refer briefly to the two subjects of research.

First of all, what does research and typification of developmental-tasks mean?

Approaches can already be found in the studies of Havighurst but developmental-tasks were not described specifically. He referred to job and relation abilities. One has to specify development expectations. That is what we tried to do by interviewing 100 young people (see (Mollenhauer and Uhlendorff 1995)). We were dealing with young people between the age of 11 and 20 who were heavily affected psychosocially and who were in therapy. Using the interviews as a basis we tried to find out typical developmental-tasks with which these young people particularly had problems to cope with. Altogether we diagnosed 90 developmental-tasks. In the following I show an extract of the diagnostical process:

Firstly the developmental-task were divided into development categories or development dimensions. Dealing with the interviews and comparing research literature with it five categories could be found which refer to social-pedagogical interactions and where young people themselves refer to in their interviews.

- Development tasks which aim to the contours of the ego of a person within a social relation. We named this category *self-portraying*.
- A second category includes the development of body concepts. We named it *body expressions*.
- In a third category we summarized such developmental-tasks which deal with acquiring time schedules
- A fourth category refers to morale *normative orientation*
- A fifth category deals with developmental-tasks which are necessary in order to cope with social conflicts. We called this category *interaction strategies*

Self-portraying , body concepts, normative orientation and time schedules and interaction strategies seem to be important categories pedagogical work deals with but also the self-interpretation of the young people. Within these five categories we could fix more than 90 developmental-tasks dealing with 100 case studies. Since developmental-tasks are related to age and are based on each other during the course of a life time, we have tried to subdivide the developmental-tasks with the help of different development models into different development stages. For this we referred to evolution-conceptions of Robert Selman and Robert Kegan. The 90 developmental-tasks were divided into four development periods which children and young people between 10 and 19 years go through. In the table you can see developmental-tasks which refer to the first development period. It is a period 7 to 11 year old children normally go through! We have to be careful with the indication of age since these



are average values. Within our research group there is a group which had difficulties with developmental-tasks which are listed as follows: In first instance it is about children and young people who have difficulties with adapting to the school and training system. Young people of this age are expected to be highly motivated in learning and in being efficient. Furthermore, they are expected to have control over their energy and the ability to cooperate as well as to deny physical violence as alternative to gain their objectives. This is too much to ask for. They cannot cope with all these expectations.

In particular, which are the developmental-tasks these young people cannot cope with? What do they have to learn in order to develop themselves? Following I will state some but not all of these tasks. First of all, we noticed that the self-descriptions of these young people were very vague (see table 1). They had difficulties in distinguishing between themselves and others. With reference to the *self-portraying* they have to learn to distinguish between their own point of view and the point of view of the others. They have to learn to differentiate their own interests from the others. The so-called *body-expression* shown by the young people at the interview were superficial and characterised by egocentric impulses such as gaining acceptance and showing strength. Main tasks they need help for is the development of a realistic self-estimation of body and the development of a better body sensitivity for themselves and others. They have to learn to give more contours to their inner and outer body concept that means to better recognise their limits of physical stress, strength and weakness. For this young people need help to express their need for strength and gaining acceptance in a social acceptable manner, for instance, by integrating their impulsive body expression in competition and play.

**Table 1: The developmental-tasks during the first evolution period**

Dimensions:	Developmental-Tasks
Self-Portraying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Distinction between own opinion and the opinion of others, between own interest and the interest of the others</li><li>• Distinction between physical and psychological components of an individual</li><li>• Differentiation of motive and physical action</li></ul>
Body Expressions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Creating a realistic body-self-estimation</li><li>• Developing a body sensitivity for oneself and other individuals</li><li>• Recognising physical limits, weaknesses and strength</li><li>• Expressing physical strength and implementation in socially acceptable activities</li><li>• Embedding impulsive body components in competition and play</li><li>• Body-self-control, control of actions committed in the heat of the moment</li></ul>
Time Schedules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Making long-term planning and not just for the moment</li><li>• Recognising time perspectives of other individuals</li><li>• Patterns of how to postpone desires</li><li>• Chronological development regarding one's own past and possible future. Chronological structuring of curriculum vitae</li></ul>
Normative Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Appreciation of social rules</li><li>• Avoiding physical violence as medium for achieving one's goal</li><li>• Applying rules of mutual fairness in case of rivalry</li><li>• Mutual help and exchange of material goods</li><li>• Showing consideration for other individuals, helping and caring for the weak</li><li>• Achieving one's own interests on a socially acceptable way</li><li>• Co-operation with others</li></ul>
Interaction Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Accepting language as medium for negotiations</li><li>• Coping with physical negotiation strategies</li><li>• Passing on desires and wishes on a socially acceptable way; mutual exchange of interests</li><li>• Alloying competent mediators and accepting objective points of view from outside</li></ul>

Another developmental-task they have difficulties to cope with is the evolution of simple time planning competence: This is the ability to plan ahead and, in particular, to realise the time perspective of other people. With regard to the development of normative orientation the recognition of generally binding social rules in groups as well as the renunciation of physical

violence in order to gain acceptance plays a key role. Referring to the category *interaction strategies* young people have to learn to use language as a medium for negotiations.

Earlier on I mentioned that social-pedagogical research not only can make developmental-tasks more transparent but should also create useful pedagogical environments. How should a pedagogical surrounding look like in which the young people are being supported in order to cope with the mentioned tasks? In order to cope with the developmental-tasks these young people need a pedagogical surrounding which offers them a wide space to act, where they can prove their abilities, strength and impulsive body-self-components in a socially-accepted manner. Also important is the social acknowledgement of their craftsmanship. Furthermore, it is pedagogically important to adopt easy forms of co-operation in order to motivate them. Young people need pedagogical surroundings/institutions which support them to talk about their experiences and to reflect them. They should also be included in daily planning processes.

Besides this type of basic research which concentrates on the typification of developmental-tasks and which serves as concept for social-pedagogical settings, in the last few years we have tried to develop and test a social-pedagogically approach of case diagnosis in close co-operation with social workers. How does such an approach of case diagnosis look like? The obvious thing to do is to use the list of developmental-tasks as a *manual of diagnosis*. This means I could do interviews with young people, taking this list of developmental-tasks with its 90 tasks and checking with which developmental-tasks he or she has particular problems with. This is the deductive way to proceed. In this case the individual characteristics of each case wouldn't be considered to such an extent. The social-pedagogical case diagnosis has to analyse the following: a) developmental-tasks which represent a complex problem to the young person and his/her social environment; b) the individual life theme, this means the conflicting themes which relate to coping with daily life and last c) a social-pedagogical plan which relates to the individual case.

In co-operation with Klaus Mollenhauer I have developed a social-pedagogical model of diagnosis which meanwhile is being used by many German and Austrian youth welfare organizations. It is based on an interview which two social workers of the organization made with young people. The evaluation of the interview is carried out according to the five categories earlier mentioned. The interpretation is being made by the team who is in charge of

the adolescent. The first step of the interpretation exists in quoting life themes of the young people. These are normally 4 or 5 themes. In a second step it is to find out the developmental-tasks which are difficult for children/young people to cope with. Normally three to five developmental-tasks can be found by using the information of the interview. Without a practical task setting diagnosis would be incomplete. In contrast to the medical and psychiatric diagnosis approach our diagnosis approach differs in so far as that the diagnosis is not followed by a treatment. Moreover the social-pedagogical diagnosis aims at a task setting which supports the adolescent in daily life to advance with his educational process. This task is not being imposed on the adolescent and his family but is a proposal of the social-pedagogical experts for a helping plan elaborated together.

#### **4. Result**

According to Schleiermeier, education is divided in two parts. On the one hand the universal part on the other hand the individual part. The universal part of education is defined by Schleiermeier as the part where older generation motivates the growing-up individual. The individual shall gain abilities with which it can enter society as well as change social conditions. That this has not changed up to now shows for example the Children's and Youth Welfare Act in Germany. This law guarantees the right of development support and the education towards a self-responsible and social individual (§ 1) to every up-growing person. The fact that sociability requires a range of certain social abilities is being proved in various reliable empirical results. Social pedagogy or social work does not only mean helping people to cope with their life but also transmitting standard expectations of our culture. This means such expectations which implicit the term sociability.

Social pedagogues always had problems with the term *standard expectations* although this is understandable considering the history of the youth welfare. Standard concepts were put on young people without granting any free space. Even when talking about individualisation and plurality in life situations one cannot avoid the standard expectations of our culture. The conveying of social development and standard expectations, this is the expectations coupled to sociability, are basic elements of educational and interactive processes. In spite of the individualisation of life situations and life styles general developmental-tasks are shown on which a successful socialisation depends on.

It is part of the educational science to make these developmental-tasks transparent. Although it is the work of the social-pedagogical research to find out the particular developmental-tasks young people cannot cope with. Furthermore it is the task of social pedagogy to develop diagnostic methods for practical persons in order to improve help for young people. For this, the developmental-task concept which I have shown here, is an important basis.

But still there are limits to the application of the developmental-task concept. According to Schleiermacher, the end of the education is achieved when particular characteristics of personality of an individual are created. He calls this the *individual business of education*. At last the social-pedagogical work with discriminated or overstrained children or young people is an act of balance intending to mediate between the partly risky ideas of life of a young person and the social standard expectations. Social pedagogy or social work tries to open educational ways and ways of life which are acceptable more or less for the up-growing person as well as for his social surrounding. This requires a *pedagogical tact* which accepts and supports the independence of an individual and at the same time copes with its moral ambivalent behaviour. The fact that sometimes unconventional ways are taken, lays in the nature of social-pedagogy.

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