Editor's Note

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The seminal theories of early student development theorists such as William Perry, Nevitt Sanford, and Arthur Chickering formed the basis for practice among the orientation directors of the 1970s and 1980s. As is commonly known, most of the first theories were developed from research and practice with predominantly White, male, and privileged individuals and organizations.

According to Pope, Reynolds, and Mueller (2004), "These early theories, based on universal assumptions about development, did little to address personal or cultural differences that might influence an individual's growth and development (gender, race, racial identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class)" (p. 39). Since that time, some of the original theories have expanded to become more inclusive while in other cases new theories and models have evolved that are more inclusive of groups traditionally underrepresented in higher education.

Pope, Reynolds, and Mueller (2004) warn against applying theories in a simplistic or reductionistic way (p. 37). They point out that

> the fact that a theory is based primarily on one population does not inherently make it a flawed theory. Nor does the fact that the theory is questioned and evaluated and perhaps even found wanting in some areas make it a flawed theory. It is simply a theory that may be more useful with the population upon which it is based. The most influential theories…need in-depth exploration of their ability to incorporate and make meaning of the unique experiences of underrepresented groups as well as their ability to furnish necessary conceptualizations, tools, and strategies for working in a diverse setting. (pp. 37-38)

It is in this spirit that the following reprinted article on the theory of William Perry is offered. Although the author (Robert P. Wanzek) retired from his role as an orientation director 20 years ago, the Perry theory continues to be used as a model for student orientation leader selection, training, and supervision on his former campus. However, this rich theory is also supplemented by knowledge from second- and third-generation theorists and interpreters such as Clyde Parker, L. Lee Knefelkamp, and Carol Widick (for their creation of the concept of development instruction) and Carol Gilligan (a pioneer in the area of women's moral and ethical development) as well as by newer theories of racial, ethnic, sexual, gender, and class identity.

While Perry's theory still has much value to offer practitioners in orientation and transition, the multiculturally competent professional will seek to "individualize theories so that that they have meaning for the individual person or context" rather than using them to stereotype or pigeonhole individuals or organizations (Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004, p. 45). As aptly summarized by Strange and King (1990), "the goal of using theory effectively is to create a campus

environment that advances…growth. To translate theory using various methods, models, and techniques is the work of the student affairs professional."

References

Pope, R. L., Reynolds, A. L., & Mueller, J. A. (2004). *Multicultural competence in student affairs.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Strange, C. C., & King, P. M. (1990). The professional practice of student development. In D. G. Creamer (Ed.), *College student development: Theory and practice for the 1990s* (pp. 9-24). Alexandria, VA: American College Personnel Association Media.