

***“Moving In, Moving Through, Moving Out”  
Nancy K. Schlossberg’s Transition Theory***

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# The background of Transition Theorist Nancy K. Schlossberg

- She has been contributing to the field of counseling and sociology since the early 1950's.
  - Bachelors of Arts in Sociology in 1951 from Barnard College in 1951.
  - Ed.D in Counseling in 1961 from Teachers College, Columbia University.
  - Served on the faculties of Wayne State University, Howard University and Pratt University and at the University of Maryland, College Park.
  - Currently she is a professor emeritus in the Department of Counseling and Personnel Services, College of Education, and Director of Counseling of the Center of Human Services Department, University of Maryland, College Park
- (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

# History of Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Schlossberg developed her theory by collaborating with others and documenting findings in books.

- She first published her research and the beginning ideas for her Transition Theory in 1981 in the periodical *The Counseling Psychology*. At the time she would describe her work “as a vehicle for analyzing human adaptation to transition (p. 2)” (Evans et al. 1995, p 110).
- In 1984, she published a book-length treatment called *Counseling Adults in Transition* (Evans et al., 1998).
- In 1989 she joined two other student development theorists Ann Q. Lynch and Arthur E. Chickering. Together they wrote *Improving Higher Education Environments for Adults* (1989).
- Chickering and Schlossberg continue to work together, combined adult development theories and in 1995 developed a workbook that could easily used in a first year experience class called *Getting the Most Out of College* (1995).

# Transition Theory in Action

As I researched her theory I found the book she wrote with Chickering called

*Getting the Most Out of College (1995)*

as the best example of her theory in use.

In the book, she explains how the Transition Theory works.

The theory explained the idea that college students can experience

three types of transitions:

- anticipated
- unanticipated
- nonevents

For example: going to college can be an anticipated transition, falling in love and getting married while in college can be unanticipated. Nonevents were considered transitions that were anticipated but do not occur. (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995)

In the working book: *Getting the Most of College* Dr. Schlossberg and Dr. Chickering used the Transition Theory to explain the transition process of college students as:

- “moving in”
- “moving through”
- “moving out”

(Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995)

# Transition Theory's framework for coping references

Chickering and Schlossberg recommended the following Transition Theory framework coping references for “moving in”, “moving through” and “moving out” of college.

4 S:

- Situation
- Self
- Support
- Strategies

(Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995)

## **Two Examples of Student Development Experiences that Could Benefit from the Transition Theory**

### **Example One:**

The transition for a student from high school, full time job or parenting to their local community college.

Then from the community college to the four-year university experience.

# **Table 1: Transition from High School, full time job or parenting to the local community college**

## **Moving In**

- New campus
- New teachers
- Now they have to pay for classes
- Now they have to pick and register for classes
- More homework
- Still have local friends and family

## **Moving Through**

- Must keep paying for school
- Is balancing work, family and homework
- Trying to stay focused
- Must keep grades up if they plan on transferring

## **Moving Out**

- Applying to transfer to 4 year college
- Applying for Scholarships and loans
- Looking for a new place to live or consider comminuting
- Is reviewing how much they can work, move away from family
- Will be moving away from friends

(My own personal observations from working at a community college)

## **Table 2: Transition from Community College to Four year University experience**

### **Moving In**

- Will most likely move away from home
- Another new campus that usually is bigger
- Will cost more money to attend
- Most likely to have a different schedule, possibly quarter layout
- Students transferring are more likely to be older now, more prepared

### **Moving Through**

- Will have to find new friends, support system
- The classes are more likely to be bigger
- Will be balancing work, family, homework and socializing.
- The classes will be harder and faster

### **Moving Out**

- Around graduation, will be looking for a job.
- Deciding if they will return home
- Deciding to stay in school and start graduate work.

(My own personal observations from working at a community college)

## **Table 3: The 4'S for coping with the transition from High School, full time job, parenting to the Community College**

### **Situation**

- Last choice
- Temporary
- Balancing work, family and school.
- Mostly likely needed to do something with my life
- Mostly like have real world experience

### **Support**

- No financial help
- Living at home
- Might have a significant other
- Enrolled in a Student Support Program
- Teachers more likely to ask how they are doing, more flexible
- Dreams

### **Self**

- “Most likely to be poor
- Most likely to be the 1st in the family to attend college
- Most likely to be a student of color
- Most likely not ready to move away from home
- Most likely not prepared in high school” (Engagement By Design: 2004 Findings, p. 2).

### **Strategies**

- Orientation
- Join a club, student government
- Belong to a support program
- Find a job on campus
- See a counselor often

(My own personal observations from working at a community college)

## **Table 4: The 4'S for coping with the transition from Community College to Four year university Experience**

### **Situation**

- Away from home for a first time
- Making new friends
- Relearn college system
- Permanent
- Living situation might become stressful with having to cut back due to increase of homework.
- More likely will cut back on work and focus on homework which can create financial stress (Berger & Malaney, 2003, pg. 9)

### **Support**

- Distant
- Lack of academic support (Berger & Malaney, 2003, pg. 10)

### **Self**

- More mature
- Few students of color in classes

### **Strategies**

- Get connected to a transfer center

(My own personal observations from working at a community college)

# **Two Examples of Student Development Experiences that Could Benefit from the Transition Theory**

## **Example Two:**

- **Post college experience**

## **Table 5: Recent College graduates transitioning into the real world**

### **Situation**

- Looking for employment
- Might be moving back home

### **Support**

- College friends, unless you are moving back to your home town
- Faculty, willing to give letters of recommendation or advice

### **Self**

- More confident
- Might be tired from school

### **Strategies**

- Connect with Alumni Office
- Connect with Career Center

(Magolda, 1999) (My own personal experience)

# Nancy Schlossberg Today

Schlossberg has always updated her books.

- 2001 she teamed up with Chickering and wrote the 2nd Edition of *Getting the Most Out of College*.
- March 2006 she has paired up with Jane Goodman and Mary Anderson to publish an updated version of *Counseling Adults in Transition: Applying Schlossberg Theory*.
- Her most recent and original publication was in September 2003 called *Retire Smart, Retire Happy: Finding Your True Path In Life* (Amazon.com, 2006).

# Closing

*Nancy Schlossberg will continue to remind us the importance of helping each other through transitions along with new strategies to keep us moving through.*

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