



Book Review of “Human Behaviour and the Social Environment: Models, Metaphors, and Maps for Applying Theoretical Perspectives to Practice”. 640 pages, Thomson Brooks/Cole, 2007, by James A. Forte

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This voluminous book which draws on almost 1000 references provides an important theoretical base for practice. After an informative introduction about models, maps and metaphors, Forte provides an impressive presentation of several perspectives for use in practice; applied ecological theory, applied system theory, applied biology, applied cognitive science, applied psychodynamic theory, applied behaviourism, applied symbolic interactionism, applied social role theory, applied economic theory, and applied critical theory. Finally he completes his book with a chapter on “Multi theory practice and routes to integration.”

The author believes that a major theme for all social work field internships is integration. This concept refers to linking what one has learned in academic classes with what one is learning in day-to-day direct experience with clients. According to Forte, multi theory practice is necessary in pluralistic societies but theoretical pluralism challenges classroom teachers and field instructors to learn how to help students integrate a wide set of theories and theoretical ideas.

Social workers as “generalists” must enact many roles: the roles of advocate, counsellor, teacher, researcher, administrator, policy analyst and mediator. To be able to effectively play such roles a practitioner needs a strong theoretical base. In Forte’s book the theory becomes practical and the practice becomes theoretical. Theoreticians are encouraged to construct theory for practice while practitioners are encouraged to apply these theories and also to construct grounded theories.

The book is full of interesting themes: science as a language, problem solving as conversation, knowledge use as a pragmatic dialogue, and the contemporary need for theory translators. Forte explains that each theoretical language or school of thought can be viewed as a family of related theoretical models and presents a useful way of understanding the role of such models in connecting theory to practice. In this approach models have vital functions. They help social workers order and organize the profession’s experiences and observations in a particular area. Theoretical models suggest new working hypothesis that can guide us in our efforts to better understand the person-with-problem-in-a-place dynamic. Modelling can be valuable to social workers in helping us to decide what needs to be assessed or measured; and they can help us collect, assemble, and make sense of our assessment data. Forte provides models from his own practice career in each chapter on an applied theory as illustrations. Forte also uses the teaching tools of root metaphors and theoretical mapping to help make complex theoretical ideas comprehensible.

Although the book covers much challenging theoretical material, Forte has succeeded in writing it in a very pedagogically sound way. It is interesting and exciting to read. His *Human Behaviour and the Social Environment* book includes detailed questions and learning activities and encourages readers to learn to think critically when applying knowledge. I recommend it to social work educators, students, and practitioners.

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