

Feature Review

Reviewed by Wayne C. Evens

Human Behavior and the Social Environment: Models, Metaphors, and Maps for Applying Perspectives to Practice

James A. Forte

Thomson, Brooks Cole, Belmont, CA 2007. 634 pages

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Professor Forte begins with a discussion of theory. He then proceeds to an explanation of how to understand theories and presents techniques to translate the models and metaphors embedded in them. His third chapter discusses mapping theories and introduces the use of eco-mapping as a tool to understand them. The eleven questions to guide the development of an eco-map for a theory (p. 111) are very helpful and provide a clear model for students to use in mapping a theory. Chapters Four through Thirteen analyze and map ten theories: ecological theory, systems theory, biology, cognitive theory, psychodynamic theory, behaviorism, symbolic interactionism, social role theory, economic theory, and critical theory.

Professor Forte analyzes each theory using the eco-map approach, making it possible for students to understand and compare them all. The final chapter addresses the use of multiple theories and suggesting ways to integrate theories or portions of theories. Throughout, he uses the dialogic approach guided by the eco-maps.

I find this book very useful. I believe it can be used well in human behavior courses to help students begin to understand how theories are similar and how they diverge. It can also be helpful in other courses; for instance, in practice courses, students frequently struggle with applying theories to cases. This book provides a powerful tool for understanding and comparing theories. Along with the presentation of the ten theories, the eco-mapping strategy can be used to

look at others. I have long felt the HBSE has needed a comparative book. Professor Forte avoids promoting one theory over others and provides students with tools to reach informed decisions as to what theories will be useful in their practices. I strongly recommend this book.

My one criticism is that the book does not go quite far enough. Along with the maps, models, and metaphors, it would be useful to look at the analogues and/or algorithms of the theories. Once one understands how a theory constructs reality, one needs to understand how the theory proposes action. The final chapter does briefly examine some of these issues, but the book would be stronger if it used the same rigor in exploring the action derived from the theory that it uses in mapping the theories.

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