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BOOK REVIEW

Forte, James, A. (2006). *Human Behavior and the Social Environment: Models, Metaphors, and Maps for Applying Theoretical Perspectives to Practice.* Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole (634 pp., $80.95, pb, ISBN 0-495-00659-9).

As a social work student in the 1980s, I was introduced to Francis Turner's *Social Work Treatment: Interlocking Theoretical Approaches.* Turner emphasized that practitioners needed to have a pluralistic knowledge base to influence our clinical expertise in a diverse theoretical continuum of thought systems to address aspects of the human condition. James Forte continues that tradition as an enduring developer of human behavior theory. His latest work is appropriate for advanced social work students who should already possess the skills of advanced critical thinking and process. He asserts that changes in our cultural populace, schools, marketplaces, and workplaces, coupled with the influence of technological advances, calls for our profession to improve our scientific approach when working with the most vulnerable and deprived. The author has a special interest in symbolic interactionism, which means that he has studied how information is understood based upon a meaning that is asserted in the art of translation—a research project, a social program, a policy brief, social work/client roles, audiences, and the like. So this textbook seeks to vet the art of translation through the development of variables and concepts that are needed to create theory and ultimately meta-theory.

Forte appeals to the reader through his incorporation of afflictive social issues in his pedagogy. He follows his own advice by using a practical yet scholarly approach to instructing the student to understand how to route the areas of knowledge in the practice of serving, helping, and advocating. Teaching students to develop theories helps them organize and structure information for practice and policy purposes. It elevates social work to a dialogical approach of knowledge building and scientific problem solving to evaluate and illuminate environmental justice work, global warming, homelessness, biological issues, and social, economic, and others. Information communicated through theory is thus systematic and responsible.

Forte's thesis is that when social workers ameliorate social problems, the quality of social membership is enhanced. The process of ameliorating social problems is in the art of meta-theorizing, as to create an organized system of thinking and communicating, through universal discourses. A fascinating thesis, Forte continues by demonstrating how one crafts a meta-theory. His text is arranged so that students first learn about practical theory and then learn the art of translating theory through models, metaphors, and maps, which he channels through popular social work theories that are familiar to trained workers. Students learn that theories become useful when translation is superior. Translation in universal discourses stimulates clients, colleagues, and social and political entities. Practitioner competency to build theories is found in outlining the perspective utilized, outlining how theory is translated, observing its raw application, comprehending its parameters, synthesizing theory in policy and practice, evaluating theory in research, and dialoguing or translating. In other words, one may develop a theory but may find other relating variables through metaphors, thus creating a process that magnifies the relationship between ideas, which are then manifested in meta-theories. These meta-theories are then communicated not only within our profession but within an interdisciplinary (or as Forte writes, "cross-disciplinary") approach, and I add, in government and industry.

The author provides the reader with theory-specific Web sites that the new-century student will find appealing. His use of diagrams and models as visual aids was helpful and instructive. Each chapter concludes with a learning activity, which enforces the lesson of each theory-building discussion. The learning activity is found with discussion questions that train the student to think through the relationship between concepts, how concepts should be translated, and the utility of those concepts into models for the greater good. Forte's contribution is a theoretical exercise that challenges the reader to think through each variable within the schemata of theoretical pluralism. It is recommended that upper-level undergraduate students, honors students, graduate, and doctoral students be exposed to this textbook to develop the skills necessary to effectuate conceptual change. It is also recommended that professors read this textbook as a refresher. Building theory, building meta-theory, and utilizing conceptual routes and translation rules in problem solving is a new-century way that social work should use to re-invent itself.

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