



## 'An introduction to using theory in social work practice' and 'Skills for using theory in social work'

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## BOOK REVIEW

**An introduction to using theory in social work practice**, by James A. Forte, New York, NY, Routledge, 2014, 264 pp., \$52.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-415-72671-9

**Skills for using theory in social work: 32 lessons for evidence-informed practice**, by James A. Forte, New York, NY, Routledge, 2014, 344 pp., \$52.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-415-72684-9

According to Forte (2014), 'the ideal social worker is too rarely considered a theorizing practitioner, a professional who incorporates the role of theorist into his or her set of professional roles and cultivates the knowledge, skills, and habits that make critical, reflective, scholarly, scientific, and creative theory deconstruction and reconstruction possible.' (p. 43) In an attempt to support the development of the ideal social worker, James Forte has written two textbooks that provide the tools for social work students and practitioners to become 'theorizing practitioners.'

In *An Introduction to Using Theory in Social Work Practice*, Forte introduces the reader to 14 different theories that are aligned with the person-in-environment metatheory and cover the spectrum of social work from micro to macro practice. Forte has created new labels for the different types of theories, such as 'acting' for behavioral theories, 'thinking' for cognitive theories, and 'cultural' for constructionist theories. After an overview of the role of theory in social work practice, Section 1 of the book introduces the 14 different theories and encourages the readers to explore their preferred theoretical orientation in order to explain, classify, predict, describe, intervene, and cooperate in social work practice situations. Section 2 covers how to apply the 14 different theories to each of the planned change process in social work from engagement to endings. Finally, Section 3 challenges the readers to consider how they will use theory throughout their professional career.

Forte's aim in *Skills for Using Theory in Social Work* is to introduce the readers in how to practice theorizing. In order to become a competent theorizer, Forte proposes 21 core theorizing skills, such as an ability to explain, to test, and to reason deductively, and eight advanced theorizing skills, such as an ability to synthesize theoretical frameworks, to integrate into professional roles, and to deconstruct. After providing a rationale for social workers to become theorizing practitioners, the book provides 32 lessons, which covers the importance of theorizing (Section 1), how to deconstruct and reconstruct theories (Section 2), how to construct 'middle-range' theories (Section 3), and how to critique and apply theory against social work ethics, diversity, and social and economic justice (Section 4).

Forte has provided two 'companion' textbooks that not only cover material on different theories that can be applied in social work practice, but the skills necessary in order to become a practitioner who deconstructs and reconstructs theories to enhance their social work practice. This material is often lacking in other 'theory-based' texts that emphasize more the application of establishing theories to practice situations without considering how the practitioner is engaging in theory deconstruction and reconstruction. In each of Forte's texts, the main chapters are constructed as short 'lessons' with a number of learning activities and reflections at the end that could be used to guide classroom discussions, serve as exercises for self-directed study, or as topics for course assessments. Although the learning activities and reflections are comprehensive, the book could be further enhanced with some example responses to enable the reader to gauge the extent to which they grasp the material, and some case examples that further illustrate application of theory to practice. Additionally, although Forte's 'skills-based'

text provides explicit content in relation to ethics, diversity, and justice, this content could be further enhanced in the ‘using theory’ text.

Both texts provide material relevant to Human Behavior in the Social Environment classes, often delivered in social work education in the United States (US), or Knowledge, Theories and Methods classes, often delivered in the United Kingdom, Canada, South Africa, and Australasia. The theories and skills covered in both texts have international relevance, yet Forte often refers to the application of the material to the accreditation standards for social work education in the US, thus, making the content more relevant to a US context. Regardless of the educational context, Forte’s texts successfully provide materials, skills, and exercises required to enhance the understanding, use, and creation of theory in social work practice.

### **References**

Forte, J. A. (2014). *Skills for using theory in social work: 32 Lessons for evidence-informed practice*. New York, NY: Routledge.

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