

METAPHORICAL EMOTIONAL EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING (MEEL): NAVIGATING RELATIONAL DYNAMIC AND TRANSFORMING LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

APPRENDIMENTO METAFORICO ESPERIENZIALE EMOZIONALE (MEEL): NAVIGARE NELLE DINAMICHE RELAZIONALI E TRASFORMARE GLI AMBIENTI DI APPRENDIMENTO



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ABSTRACT

The MEEL model explains the learning environment as a complex network of metaphors in which actions and relationships have both an emotional and cognitive basis. The authors describe the value of metaphors as a pedagogical device and outline the potential of the model for training design, depicting its ability to create inclusive educational contexts and to encourage the holistic development of the person through emotionally situated and effective learning,

Il modello MEEL interpreta l'ambiente di apprendimento come una complessa rete di metafore, nella quale azioni e relazioni trovano fondamento sia emotivo che cognitivo. Gli autori esplicitano il valore delle metafore come dispositivo pedagogico e delineano il potenziale del modello per la progettazione formativa, illustrando la sua capacità di creare contesti educativi inclusivi e di favorire, attraverso un apprendimento emotivamente situato ed efficace, uno sviluppo olistico della persona.

KEYWORDS

Metaphorical Emotional Experiential Learning (MEEL), Formative design, Inclusive learning environment
Apprendimento esperienziale metaforico emozionale (MEEL), Progettazione formativa, Ambiente di apprendimento inclusivo

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Introduction

Starting from the conception of emotion as a disposition to action (Maturana, 2006; 2012) and from the phenomenological tradition's concept of emotion as a manifestation and opening to horizons of meanings (Costa, 2011; 2015), we intend, by structuring the subject's experience and frames of action, to shed light on how metaphors, can be understood as the device for I) emotionally situate learning, making it more effective; II) orient the relational dynamic that connotes learning environments in an inclusive relational direction. The perspective of experiential metaphorical learning (Tarantino, 2018) is therefore reformulated in terms of a model we call metaphorical experiential emotional learning (MEEL), which is helpful for the parallel development of cognitive and noncognitive skills (Heckman and Kautz, 2016), and which is also capable of effectively orienting educational action and instructional design in the realization of meaningful learning experiences in inclusive learning environments.

1. Emotions as dispositions to action and opening up possibilities

The first aspect to focus on is emotions' constitutive function in structuring experiential openness and motivating personal action. To do so, we will make our own two perspectives of inquiry on emotions that, although very distant in their theoretical assumptions, converge in their conclusions and restore completeness and multi-perspective depth on the topic to us. The first is that offered to us by Maturana's (2006; 2012; Tarsi, 2024) biology of emotions. The Chilean neuroscientist shows in his works how our experiences and interactions do not take shape in a domain of abstractions but in the concreteness of the spheres of action in which we are involved and in our corporeality that immerses us in an *emotional (emotioning)* and relational flow:

we are mammals and, as such, we are animals living in emotion. Emotions are not obtundations of reasoning, they are not limitations of reason; emotions are bodily dynamics that specify the spheres of action within which we move. A change of emotion implies a change of sphere of action (Maturana and Dávila 2006, pp. 109-10).

Emotions, by specifying the domains of action within which we move, thus delineate the behavioral and relational domains in every moment of our living, unfolding the frames of interactions in which we take part. In this light, the emotions we are immersed in outline the concrete possibilities for action that we can realize in the continuous flow of our existence. Let us look at some examples:

arriving at the office, a guy declares that he wants to ask his boss for a pay raise, and his friendly secretary comments, "Don't ask him today, because he is angry and won't give you anything." Isn't what the secretary says an indication that she knows that the angry person can only behave in a certain way, not because he is limited in an absolute sense, but because he is within a sphere in which only certain actions are possible and not others? [...] Emotions are a phenomenon peculiar to the animal kingdom. All animals, including us, have them. If during the night, in your house, in turning on the light you see in the middle of the room a cockroach walking slowly and you shout, "A cockroach!" it starts running from side to side. If you pause to observe what is happening, you can realize that the things the cockroach can do in one case or the other are quite different. The cockroach walking quietly in the middle of the room can stop and eat, but the cockroach running from one side to the other cannot. The same thing happens to us [...] (Ibid., pp. 16-7).

We must, therefore, look in the first sense at emotions as dispositions that delineate and unfold the realms of concrete possibilities for action that we can carry out. In these, the individual can do certain things and not others. Emotions, therefore, as "distinct realms of possible actions" (Ibid., p. 25) open up possibilities for us, and when we change emotion, the same scenario is closed for us, and those same possibilities no longer appear. In fear, for example, we may act as "blind" to the options that were also at hand but that only the newfound calm suddenly makes them shine forth as evident; again, in anger, we may act differently than we would do once serenity is recovered and, with that, the possibility of seeing other alternatives viable by reason, which operates, intervenes and shows itself in the frame and realm of possibilities that it is the emotions themselves, however, that illuminate and select or cover and veil. "When we change emotion, we change the scope of action [...] when we are within a certain emotion there are things we can do and things we cannot do" (Ibid., p. 16). One of the things we can do when we are inside a given emotion is to accept "for valid purposes certain arguments that we would not accept if we were inside another emotion" (Ib.). We can easily realize this by considering the second line of inquiry: the phenomenological analysis of emotions. As Costa writes, we ascertain the manifestative function of emotions if, for example, "we try to discursively convince a depressed person of the value of life, or if we try to convince a Spartan to love his enemies" (2015, 6.1). Discursive reason can, in fact

be effective and motivate action only within an openness that discursive reason does not produce [...] And this is by no means an irrationalist position here, but simply an excavation of what are the phenomenological roots of discursive rationality, so to speak of its conditions of possibility [...] There is no irrationalistic complacency in arguing that in Sparta an argument concerning the rights of the disabled or love of enemies could not have found good reception, nor would pacifist arguments have been understood (Ib).

Moreover, the phenomenologist insists, even in circumstances in which strict reason convinces of the dutifulness of a behavior, "it remains mostly incapable of motivating the subject's action [...] opening him or her to new possibilities. This is, on the other hand, what emotional tones do" (Ibid., 6.2). Exemplifying again, assuming that

someone proves to me, incontrovertibly, that behaving in a certain way is unjust and irrational. I can always shrug and say, "I don't care about justice. I feel like doing it and that's what matters." As is frequently the case with difficult adolescents and people with addictions. The possibilities contained in the discourse do not reach them, do not become their possibilities for action [...] of them the subject cannot appropriate, and cannot do so because they do not set them in motion, they do not excite them: in that they do not make them see the possible (Ibid., 3.6).

It is, therefore, a matter of grasping the opening function of emotions:

Emotional openings are not a veneer that is spread over things, over values.... They have a creative or manifestative function: they make it possible to experience possibilities for action, other ways of experiencing existence, of enjoying it, other purposes to be pursued, and other ways of relating to others" (Ibid., 3.6).

As new emotions arise, meanings enter the person's horizon of possibilities that previously s/he could neither discern nor understand or make their new desires, motivations, and values to which adhere. Inhabiting new emotional dispositions, new ways of imagining and understanding oneself as a possible being, as a future toward which to thrust oneself, as another self to be in front of oneself and others, with further ends and purposes, appear on the scene for the person. Thus, new frames of meaning emerge within which to exercise reason and act as rational beings. Emotions, therefore, give existence its dynamism, stir it up, root the self in life projects, and offer desires and purposes for the will, propelling and motivating existence forward in time, directing it in one direction or another: "without emotional tones, nothing would appear, and no existential project could be sketched" (Ibid., 8.1).

We can distinguish between emotions with reasons at their base and emotions through which values and possibilities are showed. This distinction should not, however, trap us and prevent us from "leaving behind the dispute over whether emotions spring from a cognitive basis, that is, from beliefs and judgments, or whether they are, instead, independent of these" (Ibid., 3.4), to appreciate their "manifestative" function always at play. Indeed,

while it is true that to experience joy, there must be a judgment or belief, [...] this aspect captures only a superficial aspect of the structure of emotions, and this superficiality emerges as soon as we ask: why does passing the test motivate my joy? The answer to this question is simple, and it leads us back to emotional openness [...]. In fact, passing the exam can motivate our joy only insofar as it represents, for us, something in which we have something to do with it, what we call a value, something we judge to be important, and which we judge to be important insofar as we feel it is important, insofar as it manifests itself as important in emotional acts" (Ib.).

Recognizing the affective and emotional dimension in its proper space in our acting and recognizing its role in our existences does not mean tending toward an irrationalist conception of life, ousting rationality from its role. On the contrary, to grasp human action in its concreteness and integrity as an emotionally situated rational action is to open ourselves to a greater understanding in general of our existence and the meanings toward which we act. In a cultural framework such as ours that "confers on the rational a transcendent validity and on what originates from our emotions an arbitrary character" (Maturana and Dávila, 2006, p. 61), assuming and recognizing the emotional foundation of acting seems to expose our existences to the "chaos of irrationality." In living, however, "there is chaos only when we lose our emotional reference and do not know what we want to do, because we come across, recurrently, contradictory emotions" (Ibid., 62). In other words, if we want to live as genuinely rational agents, it is the role of emotions in our lives that we must be aware of, understanding them in the wholeness and globality of our existence, as well exemplified also by Damasio's (1995) lecture, which restores to the affective-emotional dimension its proper dignity in contributing to cognitive processes and in orienting our existence, aspects that the Cartesian philosophical tradition had removed.

2. Learning as an emotionally situated experience

In light of the above, we must note how "no education has formative effects if it does not mobilize affective life if it does not draw the subject in education within new emotional tonalities" (Costa, 2015, 6.2). Indeed, the learners should be encouraged to adopt an emotionally receptive condition that allows them to grasp the motivation for their actions as an opportunity of value. Nothing is of value if the self is not involved and "the condition of possibility for the manifestation of value is emotional tonality, which enables the subject to be receptive to it". (Ibid., 7.2)

Only the emotionally situated and tuned subject, sensing in the affective-emotional act the value of what is presented to him in the experience, can direct himself toward the object of learning and be called back to place and position himself actively among the possibilities that the environment unfolds as meaningful elements to be appropriated. Starting from his horizon of meanings and his formative need, the subject must, therefore, be accompanied to dislocate himself in other emotions, to embroil himself in new dispositions for action. Only in this way can new possibilities arise and mobilize him, setting in motion in his existence new impulses, new questions, and discoveries of the world and himself. Likewise, only insofar as it corresponds to an emotional feeling and a cognitive need found in the subject's horizon of meaning does content become attractive to him: this "is learned and stored where it sheds light on a relevant problem of that existence" (Ibid., 9.5). New exploratory and cognitive desires in which to reflect and understand oneself can thus emerge, and new learning experiences can challenge the learner, take on value for him and his existence, provoke curiosity, and arouse expectation and participation. When learning thus becomes an emotionally situated experience, new possibilities to want to appropriate can arise and motivate us, new ways of understanding and designing ourselves can come to light, and effective and meaningful learning can finally take shape.

3. Displacement into other emotions and frames of meaning: the metaphorical device

In our model, metaphors constitute that pedagogical (cognitive and emotional) device that allows those who mediate the training process to activate the involvement of the subject in training, accompanying and orienting him/her in new dispositions to action, urging him/her, that is, to dislocate in emotions that open up new shared frames of meaning, in which new meanings can interrogate and motivate him/her to act and learn. It is appropriate to draw on the classic lesson of experiential semantic-cognitive research conducted by Lakoff and Johnson (1998, 1999) to clarify the value we attach to metaphor. As is well known, the two scholars' investigations have taught us to rethink metaphor. The metaphor, from a mere rhetorical-linguistic, poetic, and imaginative artifice, becomes a "literal" medium of our conceptual system that structures our experience:

The essence of metaphor is to understand and experience one kind of thing in terms of another [...] our conventional way of speaking [...] presupposes a metaphor of which we are hardly ever aware [...] metaphor is not merely a matter of language, that is, of pure words

[...] - on the contrary, the two write - human thought processes are largely metaphorical, and this is what we mean when we say that the human conceptual system is structured and defined in metaphorical terms (Lakoff and Johnson 1998, p. 24).

The metaphorical systematicity of our understanding is what "allows us to understand one aspect of a concept in terms of another," with that, inevitably, "ends up necessarily concealing other aspects of that same concept" (Ibid., p. 23). This concept brings us back precisely to emotions and a crucial point in our argument: the structural similarity between metaphors and emotions understood in their manifestative nature, that is, in revealing and veiling possibilities. To understand how metaphors structure not only our thinking but also our possible actions, we can refer to the two scholars' example of the *discussion as a war*. This metaphor is reflected in a wide variety of expressions found in our everyday language: "Your demands are indefensible. He attacked every weak point in my argument. His criticism hit the nail on the head. I demolished his argument [...]" (Ibid., p. 24). It is clear that in the context of such an intended discussion, metaphor is not a mere linguistic device ("pure words") but a device that structures the very way we act and interpret others' actions as much as our own. We might imagine an alternative experience of discussion, for example, metaphors where "no one wins or loses." Then "people will see arguments differently, experience them differently, conduct them differently, and talk about them differently" (Ibid., p. 23). Turning to an example of our own, let us imagine a teacher who, in the classroom, before a test, to motivate pupils to commit, states, "Whoever gets the highest grade will receive a prize." In such a case, the interpretive framework, the domain of actions and meanings, and the emotional atmosphere that teachers and learners may experience realize the metaphor that assessment constitutes a comparison with the other, a competitive challenge to select the best. The teacher who is aware of the cognitive and emotional implications of the triggered metaphor, however, could modify the "language game" (Wittgenstein, 1967) in these terms: "Whoever gets a higher grade than his or her previous check will be rewarded." This reward would introduce actors into a framework of actions and emotional experiences that aims overall at their own improvement and is open to the meaning of verification as a moment aimed at monitoring and possibly reorienting one's learning process. Here, being assessed does not mean excelling over someone else but realizing in a challenging and almost playful form the process that facilitates self-observation and awareness of the cognitive path's directions. In such an experience, there is room for the other to appear in different guises, no longer as an opponent to be beaten but as a companion who can even mediate and support our improvement in some direction.

Metaphor, as an organizer of semiotic processes (Peirce, 1934), an interpretive script that can be constituted in "patterns of embodied experience" (Varela, 1992) in social scripts and *habitus* series (Bourdieu, 2005), lends itself to be handled and acted upon on the pedagogical level as that device that invites the subject to participate, situate himself and dispose himself cognitively and emotionally in a given interpretive opening of experience, within which a given emotion (understood according to the structural analysis we have seen) inhabits, enlivens and orients the reading of meanings that can manifest and unfold by interpellating the person, motivating him or her to transformative learnings and appropriations of self. Returning to the example of the discussion, engaging a subject on the level of "language games" to be activated and the spectrum of possible actions within the framework of a debate understood and lived as an experience of co-construction, without martial connotations, will mean for the trainer to act on the learning environment and the scenario of action, structurally preparing and designing (on the physical-body level, on the symbolic, relational level, etc.) the conditions that solicit and activate alternative metaphors of reading reality and the relationship with the other in an inclusive sense. These will be constructions of meaning inhabited by different emotions and cognitive and emotional frames within which the other cannot but manifest itself as a legitimate ally with its specificities. Accompanied in a different frame of meaning, the subject is invited to think and act within the spectrum of emotions that function in that given scenario and open up for him previously concealed possibilities for action. Thus, the overall rational meanings unfold to him, and the motivations for action change: arguing is no longer about overpowering someone but about arriving with a companion on a summit from which to glimpse a broader horizon. Everything has now changed on the integrated emotional and cognitive plane, experienced and experienced, as well as in the domain of concrete, acted, and abstract ends and possibilities of action, by which the subject measures, experiences, explores, reflects, and from which he can return to himself in the cycle of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984).

4. The learning environment as a network of acted-out metaphors

The structural similarity between metaphors and emotions in their function of openness to possibilities for action that both play suggests that we should rethink the learning environment by connoting it strongly in a dynamic, embodied, and situated relational sense, that is, as a scenario of action co-determined by the concrete acting out of the actors involved in the learning process itself. Returning to the constitutive role of emotions in our daily lives, Maturana invites us to pay

attention to the fact that, when we refer to emotions, we always refer to what the person or animal can do, that is, to the types of actions it can generate without pointing to any in particular:

[...] what we distinguish as observers when we distinguish an emotion [...] is a domain of relational behaviors, and not a particular action. [...] we implicitly connote the entire anatomical and physiological dynamics that determine the domain of relational behaviors in which the human being or nonhuman animal is moving at that moment. In a sense, a change of emotion or mood is a change of brain and body. Through different emotions, human beings and nonhuman animals become different beings, beings who see differently, feel differently, move and act differently. In particular, we humans become different rational beings, and we think, reason and reflect differently as our emotions change (Maturana and G. Verden-Zöllner, 2012, p. 35).

On the cognitive level, being in a certain domain of possibility for the subject means acting and interpreting within a metaphor that allows for the organization of experience. We can, therefore, say that inhabiting an emotion, experiencing and feeling its specific subjective experience as bodies and individuals, is equivalent to embodying a metaphor within which we are acting, to give it body and concreteness, to enact and experience it. Each metaphor, thus, must be understood as a micro-environment inhabited by certain fundamental emotions within which we arrange ourselves for action, organize experience, and take positions in interactions with the world and others. Returning to the discussion example, if we are urged to interpret and live this experience as a duel, we position ourselves and act within the emotional and relational framework that such a metaphor allows or inevitably facilitates and selects, opening us to a competitive, if not hostile and adverse world and otherness. Reframing and deconstructing such a metaphorical frame and its warring connotation means for the trainer to design, arouse, and invite trainees to take their place and accommodate themselves in a different experiential and action possibility scenario inhabited by alternative emotions and dispositions to action. Here, the social actors involved are enabled and propelled by the same frame to give body and lived and emotional concreteness to an action open to and motivated by different meanings and purposes, placing themselves individually, in flesh and blood, and actively, in an emotional and action background open to the other, thus contributing to co-constructing an inclusive learning environment that is reiterated and expanded in the very action and interaction between subjects. The environment is to be interpreted here as a domain co-specified by the subject embodied and in action, a product related to the autonomous activity of the cognitive agent who constantly operates in "structural coupling" (Maturana & Varela, 1985), relational and emotional with his or her

surroundings. In this perspective, the environment is, thus, presented as the physical, social, cultural, and relational extension within which individuals involved in the learning process inspect and experience their modes of functioning and construction of meaning. The learning environment then appears as a situated network of woven metaphors, designed and activated as an open and inclusive scenario of possibilities for formative actions; it can accommodate a range of possible individual paths recognized in their legitimacy and emotionally moving each to own personal constructive developments. Metaphor not only selects meanings and returns them to an intersubjective and communicative sharing to the actors but, in its operation, leaves room for individual constructions of meaning and the development of personal potential. Each metaphor is a plot that can be traced in a personal form within a broad and shared framework of meaning. Moreover, representing a valuable tool for fertilizing reasoning and activating one's resources and cognitive flexibility, metaphor disorients, translates meanings, makes stereotypes less binding, legitimizes lateral thinking, and opens up unprecedented perspectives for reading one's life.

Metaphor is thus not only "an important tool of knowledge construction, one of the main cognitive strategies through which, in addition to representing reality, we reflect or reason about it" (Dallari, 2000, p. 173); it has the power to disrupt habits, thaw them, restart from them, and promote, at a different level, a new *freezing*.

By conveying values, emotions, feelings, and thoughts that one is often unable to convey, describe, and shows with the use of words alone connected to logical-discursive and declarative thinking, metaphor offers itself as a possibility for an analogical dialogue between different forms of knowledge (Carmagnola, 1984) and different portions of experience. It, therefore, identifies and circumscribes a space of possible change, a meeting place between teaching and learning, an *oasis of freedom* (Casula, 2006), a free zone where the trainer is free to experience his or her most sensitive and authentic part, respecting schedules and role constraints while offering, at the same time, *plastic* spaces and times. In short, a kind of squinting vision, not entirely defined, where experiencing *flexibility* becomes a natural condition, even configuring itself in *evolutionary* terms.

Metaphor sits transversally *on the boundary between the external and internal worlds*, bringing about transference in both directions: on the one hand, it brings in the external, interpreting it with the mediation of already acquired knowledge; on the other hand, it brings out the internal, making use of a known language, to name, define and communicate feelings and sensations: it "externalizes interiority by making it communicable" (Fonzi & Negro Sancipriano, 1975, p. 52) and urges

personal resilience (Romeo, 2020). Metaphor is therefore understood as a balancing tool in a possible conflict between an internal, emotional, private, and external dimension of the subject.

Knowledge occurs in a continuous movement between the real place attended and the "internal" place of the learning subject. Between internal and external place is expressed the search for a third, intermediate place, a creative and original dimension, which the subject produces by experiencing the environment. Intermediate places are transitional places in the meaning proposed by Winnicott; in them experience is produced through the play of creativity, poetry, and authentic artistic expression (Reggio, 2010, p. 95).

Suppose metaphor can unite and reconcile such distant contexts, contaminate and orient knowledge, link reality and imagination, facilitate and protect the transit between the inside and the outside, contaminating the cognitive with emotion and vice versa. In that case, it follows that experiential metaphors can effectively serve as a training setting to enhance the complexity and uniqueness of the person in inclusive terms.

5. Experiences

The model whose assumptions we have briefly presented and named MEEL was not only born from theoretical reflections and comparisons among the authors but was fine-tuned by them in the field, developing and refining it over the years through experiential learning training activities. These activities have been addressed at adults and non-adults (school teachers, students, corporate teams, informal groups, groups of helping relationship professionals, associations, etc.) in both formal and informal outdoor and indoor settings. A particularly significant example of such experiences is "Feeling on the high seas " (Romeo, 2022; Del Gottardo, 2022), aimed at groups whose identified training needs were to develop empowerment and improve relational dynamics to better collaborate and cooperate in shared projects. This repeatedly tested course involves, after initial profiling of participants, at least three on-site training days. We are in informal settings, in contact with nature, as part of what would be called outdoor training. The activities intentionally designed by a trainer/trainee to develop certain behaviors are exquisitely hands-on and encourage immersion in doing, not shying away from difficulties. During the three training days, practical experiences are alternated with reflective moments, both individual and group. Theatrical, performance, musical, cooking, and boat outings activities follow one another and are held together by the educational intentionality of the trainers and their

pedagogical options, on the strength of which the activities are carefully planned and scientifically monitored and evaluated, causing each person to experience the constant thrill that hovers between certainty and uncertainty, between the certainties guaranteed by one's comfort zone and the frisson, curiosity and composite sum of perceptions that come from recognizing oneself, however, "on the high seas". The learning environment comes alive in the seascape: the classroom is the sea, the space of auscultation of self and other is a small island at sunset, etc. This background is chosen with pedagogical intentionality and in coherence with the model of intervention investigated so far, that is, as a red thread, a metaphorical macro-organizer within which to act and stage the learning experience globally, capable of hosting and holding together the many metaphors emerging in the course of the activities themselves. The training setting is structured to place subjects in conditions that cause them to interpret and act out metaphors of a collaborative and inclusive relationality, to develop an awareness of "being in the same boat" (Tarantino, 2016) as both makers of and exposed to a single destiny. Through activities and reflections, metaphorical devices and frames of meaning are thus solicited that pose collective well-being as coinciding with the well-being of each person without flattening the variety of profiles, individual contributions, and personal specificities: a satisfying fishery in which everyone contributes what he or she can, a serene and safe return to port, in which the crew coordinates to the good end, all tasks open to the possibility of cooperation and exposed by definition to the uncertain, to be negotiated respectfully but convincingly at the whim of the sea and the elements (and events) not always benevolent.

Why the sea? In short, because of its metaphorical potential in building crew cohesion and individual empowerment. The sea, apparently ruled by the power of the waves, at least according to what can be seen, is instead strongly influenced by underwater currents, by what is unseen but determines surface events. The sea accustoms us to consider the unexpected as absolute certainty, to try to grasp all the information that can come from even remote clues found in the same sea. The sea calls by name, interrogates, confronts us with the provisional as if it were a foothold, and pushes us to consider our contingency, events' historicity, and finitude. At the same time, it confronts us with our ulteriority; our unexpressed metaphorical activation, guided by the trainers, helps bring to light the various planned activities.

6. Criteria for designing the experiential metaphor.

As can be seen from the training experience described, metaphor needs to be competently managed by the trainer and must be carefully designed, skillfully managed, and rigorously monitored and evaluated. In a quick summary, we finally propose some design criteria that we have developed, which result from the "tests" carried out in the field and the analyses developed over time (Tarantino, 2017, 2018). After a coherent and timely analysis of the participants' training needs (Bochicchio, 2015), it is necessary to consider them when defining the objectives, analyzing the consistency between them and the potential of the chosen training metaphor between content and methodology. The consistency of the design is also a strong criterion for metaphorical experiential activities. The other envisaged steps are:

- a) *Choice and construction of the training metaphor*: the metaphors to be used in the activities must be tailor-made;
- b) *Functional emotion*: in training activities, those who employ metaphor must be able to assess and thus induce the ideal emotional atmosphere that inhabits it;
- c) *Sequence and setting of experiential tasks*: the proposed tasks should stimulate flexibility, make the activity engaging, and induce subjects to shed their usual mental clothes;
- d) *Task complexity*, designed in such terms as to stimulate rather than inhibit, in a crescendo consistent with the mental and cultural resources of the intervention recipients;
- e) *Degree of cooperation in activities*, conceived in a *range* from collaborative to individual activities.

Finally, the design of the intervention involves three operational phases:

- *briefing*: a time when the activities that will take place are presented, the objectives are explained, and all functional instructions are given for the deployment of the various tasks;
- *playing*: time of the conduct of practical activities; the trainer supervises, conducts the directing, records everything, and, above all, observes and notes. He intervenes only if necessary and to ensure safety;

- *debriefing*: a time for reflection and capitalization on the experiences just lived. The trainer solicits discussion within the group in neutral and evaluative terms. Participants are guided in a hot reconsideration of the activities just concluded; they manifest emotions, considerations, and thoughts; they confront each other on the basis of mutual feedback and with that provided by the trainer and his collaborators.

As anticipated, the reflective moment performs a central function in our model, valorizing the experience as learning. It is a phase that deserves to be carefully designed, weighing well the format, the questions to ask, and the time to devote. Useful design indications can be contemplating a *debriefing* moment after each individual activity, matching increasingly complex activities with a coherent *debriefing*, keeping in mind that each *debriefing* activity must let the model underlying the activities emerge more and more clearly, stimulating moments of self-reflection and self-learning; working on functional problem-solving behaviors and not directly on performance (Rago, 2006).

Conclusions

In the metaphor, in light of the structural analysis we have outlined, reason and emotion mutually imply each other in their constitutive relationships and result in motivated action, supported by meanings that emerge within a given framework of meaning and experience. Metaphor is a micro-environment, an experiential scenario experienced, shared, and inhabited by people, that is, by integral, embodied, active, and participating subjects, situated in all their cognitive and emotional being in the place of intersection with the other, with the world and with themselves. It is also, as seen, a device that the trainer can skillfully wield to weave inclusive environments and open to effective, meaningful, emotionally situated learning. The MEEL model brings a unified and organized synthesis of the fundamental elements of experiential learning, learning by metaphor, and emotionally situated learning, constituting a multidimensional approach that looks at the bio-psycho-social complexity of the person. Versatile and applicable to different contexts where it has already been tested, MEEL corresponds to different training needs and involves multiple training methodologies, providing the trainer with devices and opportunities for effective interventions.

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