EDUCATION AND NARRATION:
THE METAPHORICAL LANGUAGE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF INCLUSIVE EXPERIENCES

EDUCAZIONE E NARRAZIONE:
IL LINGUAGGIO METAFORICO NELLA COSTRUZIONE DI ESPERIENZE INCLUSIVE

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ABSTRACT

Narration represents the interpretive key to human existence, prefiguring itself as the mental dimension par excellence. Metaphor and narration are the catalyst agents of mental representations and for this reason, becoming effective methodological devices of investigation and intervention in educational action, it is important not to neglect the representations and linguistic structures through which meanings themselves are expressed. This contribution intends to reflect on the inclusive value of metaphorical language within educational experiences and on the possible didactic implications of using literature and theatre in pedagogical practices.

La narrazione rappresenta la chiave interpretativa dell'esistenza umana, prefigurandosi come la dimensione mentale per eccellenza. Metafora e narrazione sono gli agenti catalizzatori delle rappresentazioni mentali e per tale motivo, divenendo efficaci dispositivi metodologici di indagine e di intervento nell'agire educativo, è importante non trascurare le rappresentazioni e le strutture linguistiche attraverso le quali si esprimono i significati stessi. Il presente contributo intende riflettere sul valore inclusivo del linguaggio metaforico all'interno delle esperienze educative e sulle possibili implicazioni didattiche relative all'utilizzo della letteratura e del teatro nelle prassi pedagogiche.

Introduction

Human beings, from the very beginnings of their existence, have sought to penetrate the mystery of the universe around them and to give meaning to the complex facets of human experience. In this eternal journey towards understanding, narrative has proven to be much more than a simple communication tool: it stands as a fundamental interpretive key, a mirror in which the complexity (Morin, 2017) of human life is reflected and expressed. Through narration, personal and collective experiences are transformed into meaningful stories, connecting the past with the present and building bridges to the future.

Storytelling often becomes a peculiar educational strategy to help children strengthen higher psychic functions (Vygotsky, 2009) and build personal stories, internalise rules, understand reality more deeply and enhance individual and collective creativity (Ammaniti and Stern, 1991; Dallari, 2012; Castiglioni, 2013; Biagioli, 2015; Batini, 2022). Through story time (Ricoeur, 1983), the child starts to understand words, images, symbols and drawings by reworking them from other tales and fables, thus stimulating creativity (Pinto Minerva, Vinella, 2012) and divergent thinking (Vygotskij, 1972; Guilford, 1977; De Bono, 2013). If appropriately enhanced, creative resources can certainly allow for better personal and social development, but above all enhance the transition from orality to writing, in a process of continuous self-regulation (Zimmerman, 2002). Hence the a need for a reflection on the importance of the construction and learning of narrative thinking that, thanks to an adequate inclusive educational projection, tends to valorise and give appreciable space to graphic language.

The narrative, however, does not act alone. Like a master craftsman sculpting works of art, it makes use of sophisticated tools to give shape and depth to its accounts of the self (Demetrio, 1995; 1996; 2003). Among these tools, metaphor stands out with particular power. Metaphor is the key that opens the door to the worlds of the human mind, allowing abstract concepts to be translated into tangible images, distant events to be connected through invisible links, and profound meanings to be conveyed beyond words themselves.

With this in mind, this article sets out to explore the primary role that narrative and metaphor play in the fabric of human mental representations. Focusing on the educational domain, this study will delve into the intricacies of the human mind, in search of how narrative and metaphor can be employed as key tools to enrich the process of learning and growth. Through in-depth analysis and critical reflection,

we aim to shed light on the transformative potential that such tools can have in educational action, opening new horizons of understanding and connection for our students. Specifically, in the course of this article, we will explore how narrative and metaphor can interact to create fertile ground for learning, prompting teachers to reconsider their teaching methodologies. Furthermore, we will explore the implications of this perspective from the perspective of inclusion and openness to difference, demonstrating how the conscious use of narrative and metaphor can foster the creation of an educational environment in which every voice finds space to flourish.

Through this journey into the entrelacs between narrative and metaphor, we will attempt to lay the foundations for an educational perspective that not only challenges the boundaries of knowledge but also embraces the richness of human variety. Ultimately, what will emerge is a fascinating portrait of the power of language not only as a vehicle of communication but as a vibrant arc that unites the inner worlds of individuals into a woven tapestry of shared meaning.

1. Mental Representations: the Role of Metaphor and Narration

At the heart of the labyrinth of human experience lie mental representations, intricate pieces of the cognitive fabric that guide our understanding of the world. These representations are not simply passive records of events, but rather subjective interpretations that reflect the complexity of individual perceptions. Narrative, in all its fascination, emerges as the connective tissue that gives life to these mental representations. Through narration, experiences are transformed into stories, and raw facts merge with emotions (Riva, 2004) and meanings, creating a narrative architecture unique to each individual.

Narrative, as the primary vehicle of mental representations, acts as a mirror in which the internal world finds expression. The stories (Bruner, 2002) we create are not simply sequences of events, but reflect our perceptions, desires, fears and hopes. They allow bridges to be built between personal and collective experience, enabling individuals to share and understand the human through the filter of their experiences. Metaphor, then, stands as a trusted companion of narrative, providing the thread with which to stitch together the fragmented parts of our mental representations. Through the use of metaphor, complex and abstract concepts find an analogy in more tangible and familiar elements. This transposition facilitates the

communication of ideas that might otherwise be elusive or difficult to understand. Metaphors can also draw on archetypal and symbolic images that reside in the collective imagination, thus creating bridges of connection between people of different cultures and backgrounds.

The interplay between narrative and metaphor is crucial in the elaboration of mental representations. Narratives shape our understanding, while metaphors colour them and make them more accessible. When used together, these powerful linguistic resources enable us to express, share and understand deep and complex aspects of human existence (Gardner, 2000).

In summary, narrative (Persi, Montanari, 2021) and metaphor come together to create a symphony of meanings for the learning of the human mind; the use of a multiplicity of approaches is a powerful tool for reviewing preconceptions and prejudices regarding the fact that performance often does not express the educational potential of understanding (Corona, 2008). Mental representations, shaped by rich narratives and made more tangible through evocative metaphors, are fundamental to our understanding of the world and communication with others. In education, the conscious use of these powerful resources can open new doors to learning, stimulating students' imaginations and enabling them to explore the complexity of human experience through a diverse and engaging perspective.

2. An Educational Approach: Interplay between Narration and Metaphor

In the educational ecosystem, the role of the educator is not only to transmit knowledge but also to open windows into the complexity of human experience. The strategic use of metaphors in narratives can be a powerful tool to achieve this. In a world where traditional education often focuses on the transmission of facts and data, the educational approach based on narrative and metaphor can add a deeper and more personal dimension to learning.

Metaphors, as methodological devices of didactic co-presentation (Ianes, Cramerotti, 2015) act as magic mirrors, reflecting students' internal imagery. When teachers encourage students to express their ideas through metaphors, a direct window into their inner world is opened. Each metaphor chosen reveals a unique angle through which the student perceives the world. Through the analysis of these metaphors, teachers can penetrate the nuances of their experiences, and understand their emotions, prejudices, hopes and challenges that influence the way they learn. Storytelling, on the other hand, allows students to become authors

of their own learning stories. Instead of being mere passive spectators, students become active players in the construction of their understandings. Teachers can encourage the creation of personal narratives, which allow students to connect information to concrete experiences and bring abstract concepts to life through engaging stories. This approach not only stimulates interest and identification but also helps students develop a deeper and more lasting understanding. The identification and analysis of metaphors in students' narratives not only reveal their perceptions but also provide a basis for a more meaningful connection between teacher and student. Teachers can adapt their lessons to meet student's unique needs and interests, thus creating a more engaging and individual-centred learning environment. In summary, the educational approach based on narrative metaphors shifts the focus of learning from abstract notions to personal experiences. This methodology not only enriches student learning but also promotes a deeper and more authentic connection between teachers and students. By infusing lessons with narrative and metaphorical elements, teachers can provide students with the tools to explore and understand the world in ways that go beyond the boundaries of traditional subjects.

3. Narrative Metaphor as a Tool of Communication and Representation

In the vast arsenal of human language, metaphor shines as a powerful weapon. It acts as a linguistic magician, merging different concepts in a sinuous dance of meanings. This act of transformation is not just a playfulness of language, but a gateway to a world of hidden meanings and unexpected connections. Metaphor reveals the inherent magic of words, allowing us to explore complex concepts through association with more familiar elements.

It is now known that children's oral and graphic-gestural storytelling is closely related to learning and the construction of individual and social representations (Novak and Gowin, 1989). Listening to and reproducing narratives in¬triggers processes of "emotional synchrony" (Goleman, 2005) with educators and other pupils, fostering the transition from emotional intelligence to social competence fundamental constituent of prosocial behaviours (Levorato, 2000) deeply interconnected with cognitive motivational ones (Cornoldi, 1995; Zimmerman, 2002; Waters, et al., 2009; Cornoldi, et al., 2018). In storytelling, metaphor plays a crucial role in making human experiences not only understandable but also shareable. Personal experiences, often steeped in nuance and facets, find fertile ground in storytelling, where they can be transformed into tales that resonate in

the soul of the listener or reader. Metaphor acts like a painter's brush, transforming abstract concepts into tangible mental images. Through evocative metaphors, for example, the idea of 'lights at the end of the tunnel' carries with it the promise of hope and rebirth, creating a visceral image that surpasses the words themselves.

Metaphors play a vital role in overcoming language and communication barriers. In a world where communication is often challenged by cultural, linguistic and experiential differences, metaphors can act as bridges connecting different worlds. Universal images such as 'breaking the ice' or 'closing a chapter' cross boundaries and literal translations, connecting people through shared ideas and feelings. Narrative, interwoven with metaphors, thus becomes an extraordinary representational tool. It not only captures the nuances of human life but transforms them into narratives that can be shared and understood by a wider audience. The power of narrative, supported by metaphors, transcends time and space, carrying the treasures of human experience across generations and cultures.

In conclusion, metaphor and narrative are intrinsically intertwined in the dance of human language. Metaphor lifts the veil on hidden meanings and deep connections, while storytelling (Persi, Montanari, 2021) provides a stage where experiences can be transformed into stories (Bruner, 2002) rich in meaning. These tools of communication and representation not only allow us to explore inner worlds but also create deep connections between individuals, overcoming the barriers of time, space and differences.

4. Metaphorical Language and Inclusion

Metaphorical language, with its inherently relational nature, rises to a role as a bridge between the barriers that often divide human experience. Metaphors, as arcs suspended between conceptual worlds, can play a significant role in inclusion, helping to build common ground where different perspectives can interact and converge. In an era where diversity (Gaspari, 2008) is an increasingly evident and valuable feature of contemporary societies, the conscious use of metaphors can play a crucial role in promoting mutual understanding and harmonious coexistence.

Metaphors act as vehicles of mutual understanding, allowing individuals to explore the inner worlds of others through a familiar lens. When a metaphor is shared, it opens up the possibility of accessing a point of view that might initially be foreign. For example, imagining life as a journey can lead to greater empathy for those who tread different paths. Metaphors create spaces where differences merge, resulting

in deeper understanding and openness to the plurality of human experiences. In education, the conscious use of metaphorical language can play a major role in encouraging inclusion and acceptance. Educators can use metaphors that embrace different cultural, socio-economic and personal contexts. This not only allows students to explore new perspectives but also promotes respect for differences and openness to the experiences of others. Metaphors become tools to open up to otherness, breaking down barriers of division and creating spaces where each voice is recognised and valued.

Furthermore, the use of metaphorical language can facilitate the teaching of complex concepts. Metaphors can simplify abstract ideas, making them accessible even to students who may have difficulty understanding technical or specialised language. This is particularly advantageous in an educational environment characterised by a diversity of abilities and backgrounds.

In summary, metaphorical language, with its ability to create connections and break down barriers, can play a significant role in inclusion. Metaphors not only promote mutual understanding between individuals from different backgrounds but also facilitate learning and communication in a heterogeneous educational environment. Their potential to create spaces for sharing and openness to otherness makes them valuable tools for building bridges and cultivating a sense of community within classrooms.

Among the most fascinating qualities of metaphorical language is its ability to act as a bridge, connecting different and sometimes seemingly irreconcilable perspectives. Metaphors act as linguistic ambassadors, translating complex ideas into terms that speak directly to the heart of each individual's imagination. This power of connection knows no cultural, social or personal boundaries. Metaphors play a crucial role in overcoming language barriers. Often, concepts that may be abstruse or difficult to translate find new life through universal metaphors. For example, the idea of "breaking the ice" to start a conversation is understandable in many cultures, conveying the idea of overcoming initial awkwardness. Metaphors act as cultural translators, creating a shared language that goes beyond the words themselves.

This power of translation goes beyond mere language. Metaphors can also act as bridges between different cultural and social perspectives. Metaphorical images such as "the world is a stage" or "life is a journey" tap into archetypes that reside in the human collective imagination. These archetypes act as common reference points that can be understood and shared by individuals with different cultural

experiences. Metaphors build bridges of understanding, recognising what unites us beyond apparent differences. In education, the conscious use of metaphors can foster the creation of an inclusive environment. Educators can choose metaphors that resonate with students, regardless of their unique life experiences. This approach not only facilitates communication and understanding but also fosters a sense of belonging and connection. Students feel recognised and heard when their experiences are reflected through shared metaphors.

In conclusion, metaphorical language is a bridge that connects human experiences across cultures, languages and contexts (Fig.1). Metaphors act as translators of complex concepts, enabling people to communicate and understand (Gardner, 2000) in a more accessible way. In education, the use of metaphors can foster an inclusive environment where students feel understood and connected, paving the way for deeper and more meaningful communication.

Figure 1 Human Experiences scheme

5. Narration and the Construction of Reality: Inclusive Educational Implications

In the face of the complexity of the new educational scenarios (Morin, 2017), influenced by continuous, disruptive and unprecedented changes, liquidity and hyper-digitalisation, narrative represents a valuable working tool to design quality educational experiences accessible to all (CAST, 2018; Ghedin et al., 2018; Cottini, 2019; Mangiatordi, 2019; Canevaro and Ianes, 2022). In accepting and recognising the heterogeneity of the special needs of all pupils, the adoption of the narrative tool understood as a multidimensional formative language (verbal, graphic, artistic,

musical, gestural-motor, theatrical, etc.), becomes a fertile educational opportunity to promote the development of everyone's abilities, different skills and au¬tonomy.

Inspired by the National Indications (Miur, 2012) and the guidelines of the 2030 Agenda (UN, 2015), project experiences should take into consideration the multidimensional axes of accessibility (Ghedin, Acquario, Bogino, Pais, Bogino, 2018) and sustainability to ensure the participation and involvement of each pupil, valuing differences as resources and opportunities to be activated and recognised (UN, 2015). The integration of literature and theatre in education not only enriches the learning experience but also opens intriguing doors to explore the potential of storytelling and metaphors in depth. This synergy between disciplines not only stimulates students' creativity (Guilford, 1977; De Bono, 2013) but also immerses them in a world where words become open windows to imagination, critical thinking and interpersonal understanding.

The careful choice of literary works can be a key piece in this educational adventure. Works that shine for their rich and innovative use of metaphors can become stepping stones to guide students in their exploration of figurative language. Educators can select novels, short stories or poems (Canevaro, Errani, 2022) that highlight bold and challenging metaphors. These works act as language laboratories, prompting students to analyse how metaphors intertwine with narrative plots and how they enrich their understanding of meanings. But it is not only the reading that makes the difference. Theatre activity takes learning into an even more practical and sensory dimension. Through theatre, students not only explore metaphors verbally but also experience them first-hand. Interacting with characters, interpreting emotions (Mortari, 2017) and conflicts through bodily (Sibilio, 2002) and vocal expression adds a level of depth beyond the literal understanding of words. This shared experience can increase awareness of the nuances of metaphors and create fertile ground for discussion and analysis.

The hands-on approach to storytelling and metaphors promotes experiential learning and the active involvement of students. By designing creative learning activities (Zappaterra, 2022), such as writing stories enriched by metaphors or staging theatrical scenes, students become co-creators of their own learning experiences. This active involvement not only helps them master metaphorical language more efficiently but also brings them closer to the transformative power of storytelling (Persi, Montanari, 2021), enabling them to express themselves in creative and original ways. In conclusion, the integration of literature and theatre as educational tools offers a fascinating way to explore and experiment with metaphorical language and storytelling. This approach not only sharpens students'

linguistic and interpretive skills but also engages them in an active process of meaning-making. Through engaging literary works and immersive plays, educators can guide students on a journey of discovery that goes beyond the pages of textbooks, opening the door to a deeper and more personal understanding of the world of figurative language. The purposeful incorporation of literature and drama into the culture of education (Bruner, 1997) turns into a high road to cultivate the conscious use of narrative and metaphors. This approach not only transforms classrooms into lively settings but also into workshops where students can explore and master the power of words and evocative images.

The judicious choice of literary works becomes a key ingredient in this educational formula. Educators can select texts in which metaphors rise like bright stars, guiding students to discover hidden meanings and subtle connections. Works with powerful metaphors act as language laboratories, challenging students to penetrate beyond the words and decipher the panorama of meaning that lies beneath the surface.

The discussion and analysis of literary works open spaces for reflection and debate. Educators can guide students through questions that go beyond just "what happens" to "why does it happen" and "how is it conveyed." This process goes beyond literary analysis by encouraging students to explore the power of the metaphors and symbols used by the author. Like a detective uncovering hidden clues, students learn to recognize metaphors as secret doors to deeper layers of meaning.

The integration of theatre in this context brings learning into the experiential dimension. Students can immerse themselves in scenarios that require the interpretation and direct expression of metaphors and emotions (Mortari, 2013). Through theatre (Rivoltella, 2005), metaphors become more than mere concepts; they transform into entities that can be experienced and communicated through gestures, voices and movements. This engaging approach not only fosters deeper understanding but also develops communication skills and emotional awareness. In summary, the integration of literature and drama into education is a catalyst for the conscious use of metaphors and storytelling. Through carefully selected literary works and engaging theatrical performances, educators can guide students in exploring metaphors and symbols, creating an environment where words and images come to life. This approach not only sharpens students' comprehension and interpretation skills but also prepares them to confidently navigate the rich and complex world of metaphorical language.

Conclusions

In this journey through the world of storytelling (Persi, Montanari, 2021) and metaphors in education, we have explored the profound implications of these powerful linguistic resources. Storytelling, which has always been a companion of humanity in the attempt to give meaning to existence, reveals its power to shape mental representations and create fertile ground for the exploration of human complexity (Corona, De Giuseppe, 2015). Metaphor, with its ability to connect different concepts and make abstract ideas accessible, acts as a bridge between different and unknown inner worlds.

In the educational context, we have seen how the narrative and metaphor-based approach not only enriches the learning experience but has the potential to promote inclusion and mutual understanding. Through the conscious use of metaphors, teachers (Sibilio, Aiello, 2018) can tap into students' perspectives, paving the way for a deeper connection with their unique experiences and perceptions. The integration of literary and theatrical works offers fertile ground for exploring the creative potential of metaphors and for actively immersing oneself in the nuances of storytelling (Persi, Montanari, 2021).

In conclusion, narration and metaphors emerge as tools that go beyond verbal communication. They are ways to understand (Gardner, 2016), explore and connect the internal world of individuals. In the rapidly evolving educational landscape, the intelligent use of these resources can open up new horizons of learning (Cornoldi, 1995; 2018) by stimulating imagination, critical reflection and inclusion (Canevaro, Malaguti, 2014). As teachers, we can draw inspiration from the power of storytelling (Persi, Montanari, 2021) and metaphors to promote an educational environment that welcomes differences, overcoming the boundaries of knowledge and celebrating the richness of experiences (Mangione, Di Tore, Di Tore, Corona, 2015) human.

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