Edu4Impact - Adult Education Through Sport as a mean to Enhance Social Inclusion

Social and emotional learning and PSIS

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Social and emotional learning (SEL) refers to the "process through which one learns to recognise and manage emotions, care for others, make good decisions, act ethically and responsibly, and develop positive social relationships whilst avoiding negative behaviours" (Elias et al., 1997; Payton et al., 2000). The aim of this project is to develop and reinforce these skills through specific physical activities.
The Five Foundations of SEL
Self-Awareness
Social Awareness and Inclusion
Enhanced Decision-Making
Self-Regulation
Improved Social Relationship Management
The combination of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and dog training is a powerful educational approach, often incorporated into Pet Therapy projects (Animal-Assisted Interventions). In this context, the dog is not merely a companion, but becomes an emotional 'mirror' that facilitates the learning of social skills.
Here's how interaction and dog training develop the 5 key SEL skills:

1. Self-Awareness
The dog reacts instantly to the human's mood.
- The exercise: If a child is agitated or frustrated, the dog might move away or fail to obey a command.
- The learning: The student learns to recognise their own emotions by observing the dog's behaviour: "If I want the dog to sit, I must first calm myself down."

2. Self-management (SELF MANAGEMENT)
Training requires patience, perseverance and impulse control.
- The exercise: Teaching the 'Stay' command.
- The learning: The child must manage their impatience and modulate their tone of voice and body movements so as not to confuse the animal, thereby learning emotional regulation.

3. Social Awareness and Empathy
Dogs communicate non-verbally.
- The exercise: Reading the dog's body language (position of the ears, tail, gaze).
- The learning: Developing the ability to put oneself in another's shoes (a perspective different from one's own). Understanding that the dog may be afraid or tired teaches respect and empathy towards living beings.

4. Relationship Skills
Building a bond with a dog is based on trust, not force.
- The exercise: Work in pairs or small groups to guide the dog through an agility course.
- The learning: Improves clear communication, cooperation and the ability to resolve conflicts to achieve a common goal (the success of the exercise with the dog).

5. Responsible Decision-Making
Caring for a dog involves making choices that have real consequences.
- The exercise: Decide when to reward the dog or when to stop the activity because the animal is tired.
- The learning: Reflect on the consequences of one's actions on the health and well-being of another being, promoting sense of responsibility.

Imagine a mirror that reflects not only our image, but also aspects of our personality, our character, and our very way of being. It would be wonderful! A way of looking both within and without. Well, this wonder is embodied by the dog, a marvelous mirror for humankind, a brilliant reflection of our conscience, our personality, and our inner self.

Man, however, often merely projects himself onto the dog. If they were to truly see themselves reflected in it, they might abandon their solipsistic drift, that extreme subjectivism which disregards any reality outside their own sphere of interest, that individualism whereby every interest is centred on the self at the expense of engaging with and understanding what lies 'beyond us' – and thus also the dog and its diversity. The dog is, at the same time, nourishment, and consciousness for the soul; it is a marvelous kaleidoscope of our ego, in which we see ourselves reflected, in search of self-determination and, perhaps, self-awareness.

Of course, if we embark on this journey with honesty towards ourselves, we may discover, projected onto the dog, our psychological discomforts, and unresolved emotional issues—both narcissistic and those linked to reification—that is, those where the dog embodies, in our distorted view, what we would like to prove ourselves to be or demonstrate we can do. Recognising ourselves as anxious, irascible, touchy, neurotic, timid, weak, uncoordinated, rigid, emotional, unemotional, hysterical – in short, 'seriously disturbed' It's tough. It requires an act of humility, and in this regard, dog lovers are an interesting case in point: they don't exactly shine when it comes to humility, and as for mental health issues, they've got the lot.

The best way to relate to one's peers and, above all, to diversity, is to adopt an assertive attitude. Such behaviour allows us to express our views without overpowering those of others. Assertiveness is, in fact, an ethical approach whose core values are rooted in interpersonal relationships.

However, it is interesting to observe how 'self-love is, perhaps, the starting point for loving others, at least when it is not marred by touchiness; thus, love of self and of others, coexisting in assertive dynamics, resolve themselves in attention and interest in the identity of both. Assertiveness 'implies, therefore, the recognition of a higher form of self-love, which is love for the values of the human person'; just as, in the context of the human-animal relationship, it implies the recognition of the value of knowledge and understanding of the dog, understood in terms of its interpersonal nature, which translates into respect for its essence as an "other outside ourselves". 'Love for the values of the human person', however, is a concept whose corollary is the attainment of self-awareness, not through anger or aggression, nor by humiliating oneself in inappropriate do-goodism, but rather through an effort to seek inner serenity; the ultimate aim is, therefore, self-awareness in calmness. Inner serenity, in fact, lies at the heart of the order of life's actions—an order that everyone should focus on in their own conduct—and which becomes a reality when, with awareness, one manages to think of oneself whilst simultaneously interacting with others. This order brings us back to the concept of freedom, understood, on the one hand, as the ability to free oneself from negative environmental influences and, on the other, as the ability to express oneself in more evolved and effective ways.

In the social environment, assertiveness is expressed through specific skills and abilities which, according to Van Hasselt et al. (1979), include those qualities of sensitivity that enable one to fulfil oneself in social relationships without causing harm, whether moral or physical, to others So, if the ultimate goal is self-awareness in a calm state, when you go to a training centre, if you wish to start from the hope that it might genuinely help you communicate with your dog, or to understand whether you have arrived at a place where there is someone who can help you communicate with him and mediate between the instinctual dynamics of your partnership, make sure that your trainer has not overlooked the first, and perhaps the most important, of the qualities that must characterise a trainer, namely assertiveness, as well as its manifestation in the control of emotional outbursts, in the control of anger and of any factor that generates or fuels conflictual mechanisms, to the detriment of assertiveness. 'Visually', assertiveness corresponds to the point of equilibrium on an ideal spectrum at the extremes of which lie passivity and aggression. Along this ideal segment, at exactly the same point—equidistant from passivity and equally distant from aggression—communication arises.

The relationship between living beings, whether they belong to the same species or to different species, is mediated by communication. To communicate means to transmit and receive signals that are comprehensible to both parties, regardless of whether these signals are voluntary and conscious or not. From this perspective, communication between humans and dogs runs along a fast track. Until domestication, it developed in parallel; afterwards, it evolved coincidentally, because the relationship has evolved. Starting from a foundation based on having very similar hierarchical structures, as well as sharing the same environment in search of the same prey, the human-dog relationship has evolved through interactions in guarding, hunting and herding, ultimately giving rise to the creation of a partnership, a splendid result of social cohesion, respect for hierarchies and emotional interdependence.
The atavistic affinity between these two species, together with the perfect similarity between their hierarchical structures, is in fact not a sufficient condition for the partnership to always function in a state of substantial equilibrium.
The most accurate expression of the balance between man and dog consists in a 'dialogic' interaction.
'
. We wish to position ourselves in this intermediate space, which today presents itself with a new urgency, largely yet to be conceived, without arrogance and without the anti-dialogical pretence of being bearers of a truth simply to be communicated We would like to propose a kind of defence of truth (dialogue) against certainty (violence). The temptation of violence lies in the exhaustive, total and all-encompassing discourse of absolute certainty; it is the discourse formulated according to the phrase 'everything is…', implying a theory of absolute truth asserted as a totality. Much of contemporary thought has reacted against the philosophy of totality, of complete determination, aware that finitude is a fragment, but a fragment of truth that requires the fragment of truth that others can offer as a dialogical gift. The entire structure of existence will therefore be dialogical, both because it inhabits a communicative space constituted by language, and because what intimately constitutes it is the question. Certainly, we are constituted more by questions than by answers, and this also transforms our stance towards truth. A dialogical truth stands within the order of relational perspectivity, certain amidst uncertainty, certain of its own portion of truth which does not exhaust the totality of truth. A finite truth willing to allow itself to be integrated with other perspectives of truth, but also willing to offer its own portion of the legacy of truth. We do not propose a defeatist or relativistic way of thinking, but rather a relational one, convinced that truth, the mother of all, is the daughter of none. The fields of this work are the ethical-anthropological and the religious (in which dialogue is the true challenge of of the near future), intercultural, pedagogical, but also ontological-metaphysical, in the original sense of the term. Dialogical thought is a thought of difference, and differences reshape identity as difference; it is a thought of the gift and of relational interdependence in which no one is the guardian of the ultimate secret of truth.
And if this balance therefore rests on a dialogue, where, as in this wonderful passage by Emilio Baccarini, 'dialogical thought is the thought of difference [..]', we must, therefore, reflect on the substantial differences that still exist today, precisely because the balance between species rests on respect for differences, rather than on the essence of affinities. By examining these differences in depth, we grasp the meaning of these pages. This approach to the dog is no small matter, for it implies a choice on the part of the human to prioritise the other, requiring great openness, but also communicative skill to adapt each time to the individual dog one is dealing with; it will be necessary to adjust one's psychological, physical and, finally, vocal attitude, modulating intonation, pauses, tone, speed and volume of the voice on a case-by-case basis.
Precisely because it is characterised by adaptability, dialogic communication has as its only certainty continuous adaptation and is guided by an awareness of the differences that reshape our very identity, as well as by relational interdependence. where no one holds the secret to the truth.
All too often, we believe we are interpreting our dogs' feelings and emotions, when in fact we are projecting our own problems and frustrations onto them. As mentioned, many of us look to them as a means of expressing what we narcissistically wish to be, or, through them (and this is the trainers' dilemma), we wish to show the world just how good we are. Thus, whilst we would like our image to be

reflected in the dog so that we can reach others through him, the dog's simplicity is reflected back upon us, without the human being usually realising it.

In this unfortunate scenario, the animal is experienced as an object of exploitation rather than a relationship, regarded (more or less consciously) as a 'therapeutic tool', a producer of beneficial effects and processes, ultimately becoming, for the human, a transitional 'object' between the self and the self, or between the self and the world. The animal, transformed into an object, loses its intrinsic subjectivity in favour of a 'substitute' and compensatory role with regard to relational dynamics and difficulties, all stemming from the owner's inner world. It can be argued, in fact, that in the case of an 'objectified' use of the dog for unconsciously self-therapeutic purposes, the ultimate aim is not interaction, but rather a sort of narcissistic symbiosis. The dog, in fact, thanks to its adaptability and its character—which tends to be accepting and dependent can easily become (far more so than a cat) a neutral and fertile ground for individual narcissistic projections, driven by personal identity deficits and narcissistic voids.

Animal otherness

The relationship with the animal should, in fact, always be centred on dialogue with otherness, that is, with the other outside ourselves, respecting both its animal nature and its identity as a sentient being. Animal identity is often put at risk, as already mentioned, by projective mechanisms of both a narcissistic and reified nature, which transform them into extensions of human identity or into means of demonstrating what one is capable of 'projecting' from oneself, ultimately leading to the mystification of the human-animal relationship, which, in its most insidious and disguised form, is known as the humanisation of animals. The concept of respect for an animal must therefore be placed under the umbrella of an inescapable consideration, namely that dependence on the owner for certain basic necessities of life is not the sole element on which the owner's sense of responsibility should focus, but, as already stated, that it must encompass an understanding of the ethological needs and requirements of each individual animal. This, however, does not merely presuppose knowledge of animals, as one might think upon superficial examination, but first and foremost, and with greater force, knowledge of oneself. Only this expression of the concept of reciprocity this time, yes, structured according to a genuine one-to-one correspondence, together with love, it can therefore form the real basis for the success of this bond. Indeed, love should not be understood as mere 'purity of feelings', but as an organic whole which, whilst regarding this element as a solid foundation, also encompasses objective ethics, relational ethics and will. And since the greatest effort of will in relationships consists precisely in an effort to understand the other, it is knowledge itself that will be the glue of this relationship. Just as communication, including interspecific communication, is constituted by syntax, semantics and pragmatics, it is metacommunication —which is superordinate to these—that is, at the same time, a precursor to the relationship.

From this sense of responsibility towards reciprocity in the relationship must spring that goal of interspecific knowledge which ensures that the mutual psychosocial benefits arising from this interspecific relationship can truly be almost 'therapeutic'.

Since the human-animal relationship is a field whose vastness encompasses the immense multifaceted nature of the human personality—further amplified by its intersection with the (albeit less complex) psychological structures of animals— let us attempt to structure a sort of 'taxonomic classification' of this dimension, without for a single moment considering subjecting it to the yoke of a nomological model, which never might encompass it.

The dimensional aspects of the human-dog relationship

The playful dimension: a relationship based on play, enjoyment, self-gratification and learning, with little commitment required.

Dimensions of the relationship

– Playful-comic: enjoyment, distraction and good humour stimulated by the relationship.

– Playful-cognitive: stimulation of the imagination, mental rather than physical activation.

– Playful-performative: kinesthetic play involving high physical and emotional performance, with a strong motivational component.

Epistemic dimensional area: a relationship based on the cognitive interest the animal arouses, and on the exchange of knowledge.

Dimensions of the relationship
– Epistemic-biographical: the animal prompts reflection, memory and self-narration.
– Epistemic-exploratory: the animal stimulates an outward-looking understanding of what surrounds the person and the animal.
Hedonic dimensional area: the relationship is based on the pleasure derived from interaction with the animal.
Dimensions of the relationship
– Hedonistic-narcissistic: the animal acknowledges the person, makes them feel important and sought-after, and this lends significance to the relationship with it.
– Hedonistic-aesthetic: the pleasure of the relationship arises from observing and admiring something outside the person.
– Hedonistic-distracting: the animal becomes a means of letting go without commitment and distracting oneself from routine.
Affective dimension: the relationship is a source of security, protection, validation and recognition.
Dimensions of the relationship
– Affective-epimeletic: feeding, caring for, and looking after the animal; being responsible for its welfare.
– Affective-attachment: seeking emotional reassurance; being recognised and protected by the animal.
Social dimension: the relationship brings pleasure from sharing, from not being alone, and from experiencing a partnership.
Dimensions of the relationship
– Social-performative: based on the creation of shared experiences as a pair.
– Social-collaborative: human and pet communicate with great understanding, collaborate and act in unison.

Affiliative dimensional area: the bond is one of strong belonging and the animal is part of the human group. A relationship of mutual support develops.
Relationship dimensions
– Affiliative-co-optative: the animal is affiliated with the human group and assimilated into its lifestyles.
– Affiliative-surrogate: the animal becomes a substitute for a human figure to facilitate the person's acceptance within the human community.
– Affiliative-vicarious: the animal provides a relational alternative for the person experiencing difficulties in relating to others.
Psychosocial objectives:
within a broad area that we might define as motivational, through group activities and thus through the habit of engaging in work aimed at improving social contacts, but also simply through interaction with staff, users improve their relational skills, participating actively, learning to respect others, and learning learning to play by shared rules, and learning to build relationships both with the animal – under the guidance of human facilitators – and with other people. This is achieved through the animal's role as a 'facilitator' of interaction, thanks in part to its extraordinary ability to bring people together. It is through this dimension that it is possible to develop, for example, group sessions in which the animal becomes a medium for dialogue between humans, allowing them an approach where the barriers of anxiety or simple shyness in approaching communication are broken down by the animal. Human-animal communication, which is based on a very simple, rhythmic form of language with frequent repetitions, a rising and questioning tone—similar to that used by mothers with their children—produces a reassuring effect on both the speaker and the listener. Furthermore, given that the animal is unable to evaluate, correct or contradict the human's statements, the resulting communication tends to be more spontaneous and less constrained by the fear of being judged; consequently, the relationship that develops is less stressful. This does not, however, mean that human-animal communication is any less rich than that between humans, as it makes use of a wide range of non-verbal signals. The mental stimulation that can occur in these group sessions and which arises thanks to the to communication with others, albeit mediated by the presence of an animal and thus of a different species, leads users to recall memories,

enjoy themselves and play, thereby reducing their sense of alienation and isolation. Thus, in the realm of 'social facilitation', the presence of an animal provides an opportunity for interaction with other people, as it can serve both as a topic of conversation and as that playful element—embodied by play and enjoyment with the animal—which brings undeniable psychosomatic benefits. This aspect is fundamentally elicited by the animals themselves, as play is one of the most typical expressions of dogs—even adults—and cats. Play helps to strengthen bonds, encourage physical contact and laughter. Through it, people can release their energy and derive feelings of well-being and calm. The human-animal dialogue that is created is based mainly on gestures and touch, but it elicits an immense purely spiritual aspect that we might define as pleasure of the soul. Also among the psychosocial benefits, we can include critical or rational anthropomorphism (provided it is arrived at through the analysis of an expert in comparative psychology): the attribution of certain human characteristics to animals can represent a valid mechanism for overcoming any egocentrism and focusing one's attention on the external world first, and then return to their inner world under the guidance of the psychotherapist. This process, in fact, allows one to start by projecting and identifying certain parts of oneself onto the animal, which can lead to the incredible achievement of helping individuals to recognise and accept parts of themselves that are often rejected, as well as to recognise and make ego-dystonic parts of themselves that have become masked by dysfunctional character traits and behaviours, yet egosyntonic, or simply hidden in the recesses of the psyche and the unconscious.

Finally, the animal can become a 'distraction', acting on the one hand as a catalyst for the (otherwise anxiety-inducing) attention of the other group members, and on the other as a catalyst for social communication and the subsequent opportunity to establish human relationships, through that 'common social denominator' which the animal embodies both conceptually and as a specific therapeutic objective.

The psychological objectives:

We find ourselves in the macro-area that we could define without hesitation and without fear of contradiction as that of mental health. There is, however, a connotation of these benefits that stems from an in-depth analysis which I find extraordinarily apt. The modern psychobiological theory of personality, viewed as a bidirectional interaction between heritable neurobiological traits (temperament) and concepts of the self and the external world developed on the basis of experience (character) is increasingly leading towards an integration of cognitive-behavioural, psychodynamic and social approaches. It is from these considerations that what becomes a significant part of the psychobiological model of personality emerges, namely that the concepts of temperament and character, measurable via the Temperament and Character Inventory (TCI), synthesise recent discoveries from a wide variety of scientific disciplines, including evolutionary biology, genetics, neuroscience, learning theory, sociology and philosophy, each of which contributes, from its own specific perspective, to a holistic understanding of the development and structure of personality. 'Biological' temperamental traits and 'conceptual' character traits, two distinct yet interacting components of personality, are based on different neuropsychological and psychological mechanisms. Mental phenomena derive, as mentioned, from the brain, but since we do not wish to reduce its activity exclusively to chemistry and physiology, it should be remembered that, in turn, subjective experiences—the subject of mental processing—influence the brain. Since the aim of this discussion is a comparative neuropsychological investigation of animal-assisted interventions, we shall now examine one of the elements of human personality analysis, which is highly useful for exploring the dimensions of the investigation in a comparative manner the scope of the psychodynamic investigation of the two species; one element is, of course, Adler's work, in which he identified the will to power and the social feeling as fundamental drives of human action. In human psychology, it is well known that the links between the psychobiological conception of character and Adlerian theory do not end with the assumption that an individual's behaviour is influenced by their perception of reality, mediated by the personality function known as the 'Self'. According to recent findings of the psychobiological model, at least two dimensions of character relate directly to Adler's concept of social feeling. Both Cooperativeness and Self-Transcendence are, in fact, expressions of the principle that Adler called 'social feeling', albeit at two different levels. It is also interesting to note the application of Adlerian theory to animals, as a significant portion of research into the principles of modifying emotional and behavioural responses in

dogs can be identified within this same 'social feeling'. And, as we know, the dog is by far the species most involved in animal-assisted interventions, having proved to be an admirable and irreplaceable co-therapist. And if cooperativeness expresses the 'self-concepts' that the individual internalises in relation to other human beings, we can add that it includes five sub-dimensions or 'facets': social acceptance empathy, thoughtfulness, compassion and selfless concern – elements that express various levels and different ways of perceiving and relating to other human beings. In this way, cooperativeness provides a reliable measure of the level of social sentiment developed by the individual. And although this system is undeniably overly complex and therefore conceptually beyond the dog's grasp, at least as regards the intermediate sub-dimensions, the ultimate outcome of measuring the social sentiment developed by the individual (dog), mutatis mutandis, could certainly be comparable. Returning to human psychology, confirming the importance of the principle establishing a connection between cooperativeness and social feeling, it has been experimentally found that a low level of cooperativeness, especially when accompanied by low self-direction and low self-transcendence, is indicative of personality disorders and psychological and relational distress; and indeed this argument fits perfectly well when observing the characteristics of a dog within our social group, although the concept of self-transcendence must be interpreted within the limits applicable to an animal; for whilst the dog is undeniably 'superior', it is certainly not as evolved as humans. Indeed, for human beings, the dimension of social sentiment corresponds to a way of life permeated by positive and optimistic feelings of security, inner creativity, and the ability to achieve fulfilment through harmonious cooperation with nature, with other human beings, and with a possible higher spiritual entity. Such is the description of the character trait of self-transcendence, a complex and as yet little-explored dimension of the TCI. Proceeding with the comparative analysis, we can observe how the first dimension of the TCI, namely self-direction, also appears to be extremely consistent with Adlerian theories. From a psychoanalytic perspective, it is the expression of the strength of the ego—that is, the subject's capacity to manage the surrounding reality and direct their own life according to freely chosen goals and objectives, modulating the more instinctual aspects of their psychic being as expressed in their temperament. This dimension, too, is wonderfully and perfectly transposable into what we might identify and define as 'canine psychology'. However, what self-direction measures through the TCI is the strength of the Self, that is, the set of self-concepts that the subject has internalised regarding their ability to manage reality, whereas what it measures in dogs is certainly self-confidence. In humans, the relationship linking this aspect of character to Adler's concept of the inferiority complex is very close. Indeed, we can say that in many ways self-direction is the opposite of the inferiority complex, just as in dogs Realistically, the flip side of a lack of self-confidence is anxiety, which is its primary precursor.

In humans, low levels of self-direction imply a lack of self-acceptance, both physical and psychological, a feeling of having no resources, and an inability to set any achievable goals – from which stems an inability to take responsibility for one's own life. The human-animal bond is based primarily on emotions which, in turn, foster psychological growth, awareness and the assumption of one's own responsibilities; these, naturally, will be proportionate to one's age and responsibilities, as in the case of children, who must necessarily be supported by their parents in caring for any pet they may own. This is how the relationship with an animal can become thoroughly therapeutic, since, when skilfully guided (externally directed), it fosters the development of self-direction and the strengthening of self-confidence—elements that become precursors, for example, to the partial remission of symptoms of depression as well as those of anxiety disorders. The bond of attachment that develops between humans and animals can, at least in part, compensate for any lack of interpersonal attachment, and foster the development of bonds of attachment based on trust, which can subsequently be transferred to other individuals. • The empathic capacity to identify with the the animal inevitably extends to relationships with other human beings as well. I find it plausible, moreover, that any comparison between humans and dogs that follows the lines of the structures in question may refer to the mutual psychosocial benefits of the human-animal relationship, without necessarily having to resort to animal-assisted interventions, but also by limiting the observation to the structures that arise from the simple ownership of an animal, and of a dog in this case.

The dimensions of the sense of responsibility in caregiving, with the necessary differences, are in fact inherent in every 'higher' living species, by ontogenesis.

The emotional objectives:

contact with animals promotes the consolidation of an individual's empathic abilities, resulting in an improvement in their emotional capacities. The best description of this dimension is provided by the concept of therapeutic empathy. We know this to be a fundamental mechanism of treatment. However, if we wish to move into a less abstract realm, the insights provided by neuroscience are of interest. We know that therapeutic empathy can be understood not so much as a harmony between the verbal cognitions of the left brain, but rather as a non-verbal psychobiological attunement of the right brain. It is precisely in this sense that synchronising affective transactions are used to generate interaction and then amplify the effects the positive factors that shape the patient's attachment to the co-therapist animal. This attachment to the animal is characterised by unconscious yet reciprocal influences, through which the same therapeutic alliance is established as would be with a human therapist, but with far fewer filters.

Obviously, emotional attunement requires a laborious relational strategy that must be appropriately mediated by competent practitioners, as the unregulated primitive emotions of the right brain—including shame, disgust, terror, anger and despair, as well as euphoria and excitement—could exert a significant yet potentially harmful influence and must therefore be kept under appropriate control. Between the animals and the clients, mechanisms may develop characterised by transference emotions expressed by the clients, and by visceral and somatic counter-transference reactions from the dog's right brain, to give the most compelling example. The alliance between dog and human, free from filters of any kind—such as social and cultural superstructures—means that the client unconsciously perceives the animal as a 'safe place' so deeply reassuring that it encourages a deeper self-revelation; although this is experienced with the animal co-therapist, it can be explored by the human therapist.

What happens is that defence mechanisms—conceived as unconscious strategies of emotional regulation aimed at avoiding, minimising or transforming emotions that are too difficult to bear are alleviated by animals. And so, whilst we know that 'hot' emotions trigger non-linear disruptions in the right hemisphere of the human brain, leading to a dysregulation of the sense of self, the pleasant and beneficial connection that can be achieved with animals works in exactly the opposite way, fostering a sense of unity within the self. And these activities with animals can serve to prevent the onset of terrifying states when one is overwhelmed by intense emotions, which could potentially traumatically disrupt the self-system. This can be of great assistance in creating those internal operational models within the right hemisphere that will be encoded to implement strategies for affective regulation and behavioural guidance in interpersonal relationships, first with the non-human animal, and then, through skilful generalisation work mediated by those responsible for the psychotherapeutic aspect, with humans. If the perceptual predispositions of the right brain, during its early development, rapidly and unconsciously detect stimuli perceived as threatening, stress management strategies can be structured by carefully planning a beneficial emotional attunement between human and animal, in order to work on those aspects of self-dysregulation which are directly linked to threatening events. In short, the therapeutic relationship with animals helps to mitigate the activation of the right hemisphere of the brain, which is overstimulated by negative emotions, and thus counteracts self-dysregulation.

The relationship with the animal becomes a sort of therapeutic mechanism for interactive repair, facilitating the mutual regulation of affective homeostasis, with the advantage of a lower likelihood of triggering defensive avoidance on the part of the client, which might otherwise arise in relation to a human therapist.

The very nature of the animal co-therapist endows it with an exponentially greater emotional tolerance than a human therapist, as in the case of a dog, for example, making this a decisive factor in assessing the benefits of therapeutic relationships, both in terms of the range and the type and intensity of the emotions explored within the therapeutic alliance. The focus is on prosodic form, that is, on all those structures of emotional communication guided by the right hemisphere and interpreted by the therapist's own right hemisphere.

The therapeutic technique is aimed at enhancing emotions from a primitive, sensory-motor and symbolic experiential level to a mature symbolic representational level, drawing on the work of the psychotherapist who must guide the client towards that generalisation which allows the transition from the relationship to other species and to one's fellow human beings, thereby laying the foundations for the development of a self-reflective stance capable of assessing the significance of these emotions, starting with those towards animals and extending to those towards humankind. This can occur if, within this interactive therapeutic environment that facilitates emotional growth, the psychotherapist's work aims to promote in the client a process of self-organisation capable of effectively modulating a broader range of emotions, integrating emotions into a variety of adaptive motivational states, and using emotions as signals that lead the individual to link coherent behavioural states to appropriate social contexts.

The reconstruction or enhancement of the client's capacity for self-regulation becomes the primary objective. The ability to flexibly regulate emotional states through interactions with animals—in what constitutes an interactive regulation mediated by the therapists, and thus carefully externally directed—can be generalised to human beings. This is despite starting with animals, which represent self-regulation in contexts of autonomy, precisely because it is embodied by the absence of other human beings. The psychotherapist's work then leads the client/patient to the flexible ability to switch adaptively between these two modes of regulation.

In the long term, the therapeutic objective is that of reorganising insecure internal working models by transforming them into secure models acquired through the therapeutic relationship with the animal, a safe haven for human emotions. These secure models enable more complex forms of intrapsychic organisation, which can be transferred to interpersonal behaviour, leading to an evolutionary advancement in the ability to maintain a coherent, continuous and unified sense of self. And this can occur across a wide spectrum of contexts, both within the family and outside the family unit. This is how the relationship with the animal, a function of the right brain and the biological substrate of the human unconscious mind, can have a broad therapeutic significance.

The most succinct and comprehensive expression of the possible relationship between a man and a dog is encapsulated in a thought by Goethe, who in *The Sorrows of Young Werther* was actually referring to a riding school, but which can be applied equally to dogs simply by changing the setting of the action—that is, the 'riding school'—to 'a place where one learns to train one's dog', through a 'cynological reinterpretation' that would simply rewrite it as follows: 'The reason why the place where one learns to train one's dog has such a beneficial effect on rational beings is that here, the only place in the world, it is possible to comprehend with the mind and observe with the eyes the appropriate limits of action 'and the exclusion of all caprice and chance; here man and beast merge into one, to such an extent that one could not say which of the two is actually training the other' (The Sorrows of Young Werther).